

**PERSECUTED AND THRIVING:
MESERETE KRISTOS CHURCH LEADERSHIP DURING THE ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION
(1974-1991)**

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To men and women who lead with purpose, integrity, love and creativity,
giving faithful witness to Jesus Christ amid persecution.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CCCE	Council for the Cooperation of Churches in Ethiopia
CECE	Council for Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia
COPWE	Commission for Organizing the Party of the Workers of Ethiopia
EECMY	Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus
EMM	Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions
EOTC	Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
EPDM	Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Movement
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
FGBC	Full Gospel Believers' Church (Mulu Wengel)
MEISON	All Ethiopian Socialist Movement
MKC	Meserete Kristos Church
NDRPE	National Democratic Revolution Programme of Ethiopia
NLM	Norwegian Lutheran Mission
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OPDO	Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization
PDRE	People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
PMAC	Provisional Military Administrative Council
QHC	Qale Heywet Church
SEM	Swedish Evangelical Mission
SIM	Sudan Interior Mission
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front
WPE	Workers' Party of Ethiopia

GLOSSARY

Abune:	Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.
Amagnyoch:	Believers.
Balabat:	Title and administrative position conferred by the Ethiopian Empire on a local community leader. The balabat supervised tax collection, organized corvée (unpaid labor), and mediated some disputes, referring others to the courts.
Debtera:	Chorister/scribe in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.
Derg:	Amharic for “Committee,” referring to the Armed Forces Coordinating Committee; also the Provisional Military Administrative Council.
Gebere:	Rural dwellers administrative unit.
Kebele:	Urban dwellers administrative unit.
Meserete Kristos Church:	“Christ is the foundation” Church (Mennonite).
Mekane Yesus Church:	“Place of Jesus” Church (Lutheran).
Mulu Wengel Church:	Full Gospel Believers’ Church (Pentecostal).
Neftegnas:	Soldier Settlers.
Pente:	A pejorative term, initialling applied only to Pentecostal Christians, which came to imply imperialist and counterrevolutionary allegiances, used against all evangelical Christians.
Qale Heywet Church:	“Word of Life” Church (Sudan Interior Mission).
Tsere Mariam:	Anti-Mary.
Yäsämay bərhan:	“Heavenly Sunshine” renewal movement based in Nazareth.
Zemecha:	A development campaign set up by the Derg, conscripting students to do literacy training and Marxist indoctrination throughout Ethiopia.
Zemene Mesafint:	Era of the Princes (1769-1855).

Note on Ethiopian names

Ethiopian names are comprised of a person’s given name followed by that of his or her father. It is misleading, then, to refer to someone by their second name alone or to treat it like a surname in a bibliography. When a single Ethiopian name is used in the text of the thesis, it will be the given name. Ethiopian bibliographic entries will be alphabetized by the given name.

Interviewee names in Chapter Six are pseudonyms unless the research participant asked that his or her real name be used.

ABSTRACT

This historical case study explores leadership in the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) during the 1974-1991 Ethiopian Revolution using Robert Quinn's concept of the "Fundamental State of Leadership" as a research lens. Based on interviews and other first-person accounts, analysis indicated that persecution forced MKC leaders to clarify the priority of their devotion to Jesus and engagement in his mission. Ready to die for the sake of the gospel, their leadership was marked by a highly effective pursuit of purpose, compelling integrity under pressure, attractive love, remarkable creativity, and transformational commitment, empowered by the Holy Spirit, leading to miraculous results.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Now here is a heretical thought. Leadership is not about results. It is about commitment. The entire management literature fails to understand this. Leadership authors do not understand that leadership means “Go forth to die.” Most people want to be told how to get extraordinary results with minimum risk. They want to know how to get out-of-the box results with in-the-box courage. These are the questions of the normalized world.

– Robert Quinn, *Change the World*

Countless men and women exercise Christian leadership in contexts of substantial opposition and personal suffering. Persecuted because of their faith in Jesus Christ, many pursue God-given purpose rather than comfort, lead with integrity despite external pressure, focus on others rather than self, and maintain an open posture of learning rather than isolating themselves from difficult realities.¹ Such leadership necessarily entails exceptional commitment and faith. This chapter considers the realities of persecution and leadership in the global church, identifies the nature and scope of this historical case study, defines key terms, namely *persecution* and *leadership*, and provides an overview of the thesis-project.

A. Contemporary persecution and leadership

According to the Pew Forum report, *Trends in Global Restrictions on Religion*, as of mid-2014, 74% of the world’s population lived in nations where individuals, social groups or governments limit religious freedom to a considerable degree. The world’s most widely persecuted religious group, Christians in 79 countries are subject to high or very high restrictions on practicing their faith by government officials or organizations, and in 74 countries face high or very high levels of social oppression motivated by religious hatred or bias against them.² Because persecution sometimes targets members of some but not all

¹ These qualities are adapted from the description of the “Fundamental State of Leadership,” in Robert E. Quinn, *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It: A Guide for Leading Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 14-26.

² Peter Henne, *Trends in Global Restrictions on Religion* (Washington: Pew Research Center, June 23, 2016), <http://www.pewforum.org/2016/06/23/trends-in-global-restrictions-on-religion>. The Pew study consolidates global surveys on religious freedom, distinguishing between government restriction and social hostility involving religion before combining them in a joint index. Although 24% of countries had high or very high levels of government restrictions, and 23% had high or very high social hostilities involving religion, they are among the most populous nations. In an analysis of a 2010 report, Thomas Schirrmacher, “The Situation of Christians and Muslims according to the Pew Forum’s ‘Global Restrictions on Religion,’” *International Institute for Religious Freedom Reports* 1, no. 1 (January 2012), applied Pew Forum percentages to religious demographic statistics for each nation and concluded that at least 304 million followers of Jesus in 95 countries were subject to government officials or organizations which place high or very high levels of restriction on their faith; 327.5 million lived in 77 countries with high or very high levels of social oppression motivated by religious hatred or bias against them. Also Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert, and Nina Shea,

Christian denominations or may affect only certain national regions, it is estimated that two hundred million followers of Jesus face significant harassment, persecution, and/or the possibility of martyrdom because of their faith. Primary sources of contemporary persecution include radical Islam, communism, religious nationalism, and secular humanism.³

Many Christians in Western democracies romanticize the impact of persecution on churches, assuming that it inevitably leads to growth, citing Tertullian's adage that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."⁴ Researchers have indeed identified common positive results when Christians are persecuted:

- Believers often grow in spiritual maturity and commitment to Christ as they learn to rely more fully on God;
- Churches may experience miraculous answers to prayer;
- The grace and power of God is revealed as believers show love to persecutors;
- Persecution may give public exposure to the courage of believers and their witness to Christ, often drawing attention and respect from people who would otherwise ignore Christianity;
- Persecution prevents the spread of nominalism among believers;
- The Holy Spirit may bring revival to a church under persecution;
- Church members have opportunity to show love and care to other suffering believers;
- The church sometimes experiences numerical growth under persecution.⁵

Although environments of persecution may provide opportunities for spiritual growth, showing love for enemies, sacrificial witness to Jesus Christ, purification and revival of the church, and fresh

Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 4, who cite the Catholic Bishops' Conferences of the European Community calculation that 75 percent of acts of religious intolerance globally are directed against Christians.

³ Christof Sauer and Thomas Schirrmacher, "A Global Survey: Religious Freedom and the Persecution of Christians," in *Sorrow and Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom*, eds. William D. Taylor, Antonia van der Meer and Reg Reimer (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2012): 7-13. See Ronald Boyd-MacMillan, *Faith that Endures: The Essential Guide to the Persecuted Church* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2006), 123-142, for a survey of primary sources of persecution, and John L. Allen, Jr., *The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution* (New York: Image, 2013) for a comprehensive global survey of anti-Christian persecution.

⁴ Vernon Jay Sterk, "The Dynamics of Persecution" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1992), xiii-xiv; Nguyen Huu Cuong, "The Growth of Certain Protestant Churches in Saigon under the Vietnamese Communist Government from 1975" (D.Min. diss., San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1995), 162.

⁵ Cuong, "The Growth of Certain Protestant Churches," 92-162, 184; John Moldovan, "Lessons from Ministry in the Context of Violence in Eastern Europe," in *Missions in Contexts of Violence*, ed. Keith E. Eitel (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2008), 351-352; Kurt Nelson, "Finishing Well: Encouraging Pastors to Persevere under Persecution" (D.Min. diss., Columbia International University, 2008), 93-95, 120-121, 127-128; Sterk, "Dynamics of Persecution," 199-201, 236-237. Marshall, et al., *Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians*, 5, cite China, Vietnam, and Cuba as notable examples of countries in which Christianity experienced significant growth, particularly when persecution decreased in intensity.

revelation of the power of God, by its very nature persecution is designed to undermine the advance of the gospel and the well-being of Christians. It inflicts both short-term and long-term harm on individuals and churches, potentially resulting in:

- Emotional, physical and spiritual pain for the targets of persecution;
- A weakened church when believers deny their faith to escape suffering;
- A disempowering sense of fear;
- Reduced integrity for Christians who hide their faith identity or make regular moral compromises in order to survive;
- Privatization of faith as believers attempt to avoid attention from persecutors;
- Evangelism stifled by the discouragement of believers, their desire to avoid suffering and potential converts' fear of persecution;
- Churches susceptible to division arising from a climate of mistrust between individuals and groups;
- Local churches isolated from other congregations;
- An increased tendency for churches to become closed subcultures marked by legalism, defensiveness, suspicion toward change, and strong social pressure to remain in the group even when initial belief has gone;
- Diminished confidence in the power of the gospel due to relentless anti-Christian propaganda;
- The loss of the church's witness to Christ if Christians respond to persecution with violence, entering a spiral of religious conflict;
- The death of a congregation or end of all Christian witness in a region.⁶

⁶ B. K., "Reflections on Mission: Mission in the Context of Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom," and Paul Estabrooks, "Preparing both Church and Missionaries: Global North," in *Sorrow and Blood*: 15-20, 351-356; Cuong, "The Growth of Certain Protestant Churches," 1-4, 39-42, 45-46, 157; Moldovan, "Lessons from Ministry," 351; Marsh Moyle, *The Effects of Persecution on Church and Mission in Central and Eastern Europe*, (Hinckley, Leics, UK: CityGate, 1989), 4-9, 12; Nelson, "Finishing Well," 134-135; Sterk, "Dynamics of Persecution," 69, 187-195; Carl A. Volz, *Pastoral Life and Practice in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), 56; Janet Keller Richards, *Unlocking our Inheritance: Spiritual Keys to Recovering the Treasures of Anabaptism* (Morgantown, PA: Masthof Press, 2005), 109-118, describes the lingering impact of sixteenth-eighteenth century persecution on Amish and Mennonite groups which muted their evangelistic witness in order to survive, signing non-proselytization agreements with governing authorities in exchange for permission to settle in Alsace, Ukraine and the German Palatinate. Thomas Finger, "An Anabaptist-Mennonite Theology of Suffering: Some Features, in *The Suffering Body: Responding to the Persecution of Christians*, ed. Harold D. Hunter, and Cecil M. Robeck (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006): 37-61, suggests that the intense suffering and martyrdom of first generation Anabaptists led to an emphasis on suffering as "the mark of a true Christian," with the cross overshadowing the resurrection in the spirituality of the movement, accompanied by a withdrawal from mission into "somewhat separated communities." John Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia – and How it Died* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 3-34, 97-172, 207-225, and Mark Galli, "Is Persecution Good for the Church? Sometimes It Isn't," *Christianity Today*, 41, no. 6 (May 19, 1997) identify persistent organized violence as the largest single factor in the decline and extinction of Christianity in vast regions of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Striking examples include Chinese Nestorian, North African and Japanese Christian communities destroyed by severe persecution from the eighth to the seventeenth centuries. Paul Marshall, et al,

The church needs courageous and creative leadership in times of persecution, but persecutors typically focus the brunt of their coercive power on Christian leaders in order to weaken and eradicate their influence. Although many remain faithful to Jesus Christ and those whom they serve, the pressure of persecution can result in church leaders who:

- Cease to exercise leadership due to apostasy, fear, exile, or death;
- Make compromises with governing authorities to secure their own safety, damaging trust between them and their followers and undermining their moral authority;
- Conform to the expectations of authorities, restrict preaching to “safe” topics and imitate dysfunctional government leadership norms;
- Are hindered in their leadership by physiological and emotional impacts of persecution, such as injury, lack of sleep, debilitating fear, paranoia and post-traumatic stress disorder;
- Experience marital and family insecurity and tension due to the pressure of persecution on their families;
- Feel regret, guilt and shame when their responses to persecution are not as loving and faith-filled as they would like them to be;
- Have limited opportunities for formal continuing education.⁷

Despite the suffering and constraints that come with persecution, many men and women lead with creativity, purpose, integrity and love in these conditions for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the world for which he gave his life. Very little attention, however, has been given to the dynamics of leadership in contexts of persecution. The 2004 Lausanne Forum for World Evangelization Occasional Paper, “The Persecuted Church,” identifies the need of the persecuted church for strong leadership through the trials and victories of suffering. Its recommendations include:

- **Capacity building within and for the persecuted Church** through training for believers to endure persecution, leaders for ministry, and practical/vocational training to strengthen the Church economically.
- **Networking and partnership between the persecuted and non-persecuted, as well as between different parts of the persecuted Church** in order to strengthen the Body of Christ.

Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians, 5-6, contend that over the past hundred years, the Christian presence has declined in Iraq from 35 percent to 1.5 percent, in Iran from 15 percent to 2 percent, in Syria from 40 percent to 10 percent, and in Turkey from 32 percent to 0.15 percent, primarily due to religious persecution.

⁷ Cuong, “The Growth of Certain Protestant Churches,” 1, 17, 25-28, 86-87, 157; Ivo Lesbaupin, *Blessed Are the Persecuted: Christian Life in the Roman Empire, A.D. 64-313* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 15; Moldovan, “Lessons from Ministry,” 348-351; Moyle, *Effects of Persecution on Church and Mission*, 9-10; Nelson, “Finishing Well,” 1-4, 11, 41-42, 83-84; 119-125. For statistics showing leaders as targets for persecution, see Todd M. Johnson, ed., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/ Boston: Brill, accessed July 2013), who finds that 2.0% of all Christian leaders who have ever lived have been martyred, compared to 0.8% of all Christians. Notable fictional explorations of failure and faithfulness in Christian leadership under persecution include Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory* (New York: Penguin, 1971), and Shusaku Endo, *Silence*, trans. William Johnson (London: Peter Owen, 2007).

Goals include encouraging those who are suffering, giving the global church access to the spiritual insights and example of the persecuted, facilitating practical help, counselling, theological reflection, helping Christians prepare for increases or reductions in freedom, and learning from the experience of others.

- **Developing a theology of persecution**, drawing on lessons learned from churches under persecution, especially with regard to missiology.⁸

The comprehensive 2009 *Bad Urach Statement*, “Developing an evangelical theology of suffering, persecution and martyrdom for the global church in mission,” reaffirms the above Lausanne recommendations. While focused on theology, it also fleshes out strategy for “capacity building within and for the persecuted church,” and affirms goals identified by the Asian Church, including:

- Creating worldwide awareness of how certain parts of the church are functioning under varied types of restriction;
- Learning from churches suffering under repressive regimes how they remain steadfast in faith and in growth despite restrictions;
- Encouraging local churches experiencing difficulties through prayer support and other practical forms of help;
- Equipping local churches to convert times of trouble into occasions for testimony to Jesus Christ;
- Preparing churches to face possible adversity in years ahead by affirming the oneness of the Body of Christ, cultivating a deeper measure of active global cooperation, and creating avenues of contact and communication directly or indirectly with churches suffering persecution.

The *Bad Urach Statement* urges that biblical teaching on persecution and martyrdom become an integral element of theological education, encouraging theoretical reflection on this topic as well as practical and pastoral application in training future leaders for the body of Christ. It recognizes that such knowledge is necessary not only for the church in contexts of severe persecution, but that: “Persecuted Christians have learned truths about God that Christians under less pressure need to hear in order to experience the fullness of God. The spiritual insights of the persecuted are vital to the transformation of the lives of the rest of the body of Christ.”⁹

⁸ Patrick Sookhdeo, *The Persecuted Church, Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 32* (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 2005). Other recommendations concern advocacy, legal issues, prayer, and practical assistance.

⁹ Christof Sauer, ed., “Bad Urach Statement: Towards an Evangelical theology of Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom for the Global Church in Mission,” in Christof Sauer and Richard Howell, eds., *Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom: Theological Reflections*, Religious Freedom Series, 2 (Johannesburg: AcadSA Publishing, 2010): 27-106; organized by the International Institute for Religious Freedom, sponsored by the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission, Theological Commission and Mission Commission, and the Lausanne Theological Working Group, the consultation prepared the statement for the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, Cape Town 2010. One signatory, Reg Reimer, “Christian Responses to Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom,” in *Sorrow and Blood*: 23-30, observes that the contemporary persecuted church shares a context similar to the New Testament church and has much to share with the overly rational and sometimes spiritually flabby churches of the West. Another, Boyd-

The global church has much to learn from persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ, particularly those who exercise leadership despite great personal cost. There are many potentially rich fields of inquiry into the experience of the persecuted church. Among them, the study of leadership warrants significant priority. Given the tremendous challenge of leadership in such contexts of pressure and suffering, those who lead with integrity despite external pressure, pursue the mission of Jesus ahead of personal comfort, focus on others rather than self, and maintain an open posture of learning surely have much to contribute to the “capacity-building” of the whole Body of Christ. A compelling case for study can be found in the experience of the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) during the Ethiopian revolution (1974-1991). Subject to the hostility of the Marxist Derg regime, MKC suffered the arrest of key leaders, government seizure of church buildings and institutions, and the outlawing of the church itself. Many men and women persisted in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and action despite persecution in this time, during which the church 1) grew from 800 to 34,000 baptized members, 2) greatly expanded its geographic reach, 3) dramatically increased the number of men and women engaged in active ministry, 4) transitioned from being “a Sunday church to an everyday church,” 5) became financially self-supporting, 6) adopted a radically new ministry structure, and 7) supported a contagious spiritual vitality among its members.

B. Nature and scope of study

This historical case study explores the experience and practice of leadership in the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) under the persecution of the Derg regime from 1974 to 1991. While drawing on literature regarding persecution, leadership theory, biblical theology, and Ethiopian culture and history, primary research is based on first-person testimony from men and women who were active in MKC leadership during the Ethiopian revolution, from 1) twenty-two interviews conducted March-May 2014, 2) eight written accounts, and 3) a 1992 video documentary. Limiting this study to the case of MKC leaders from 1974-1991 has clear advantages:

- 1) Persecution occurred over a significant, historically defined and documented period;
- 2) A sizable pool of leaders is available to reflect on their experiences during the persecution of the revolutionary era;

MacMillan, *Faith that Endures*, 13, notes, however, that, “The fuller story of the contemporary persecuted church remains a tragically untold story.”

- 3) Leaders can speak from the safety and vantage point of freer conditions without fear of endangering themselves or their families.

As qualitative research, this case study may provide insights into leadership in other contexts, but findings are not statistically generalizable. It is an exercise in practical theology, defined by John Swinton and Harriet Mowat as: “critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God’s redemptive practices in, to and for the world.” Richard Osmer identifies four interpretive tasks in practical theology:

1. The *descriptive-empirical task* is to gather information in order to discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations or contexts. Asking “What is going on?” this task participates in Christ’s priestly listening ministry.
2. The *interpretive task* draws on theories from the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring. Asking “Why is this going on?” this task shares in Christ’s ministry of sagely wisdom.
3. The *normative task* uses theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations or contexts, and construct ethical norms to guide a faithful response and learn from “good practice.” This task asks “What ought to be going on?” and reflects Jesus’ ministry of prophetic discernment.
4. The *pragmatic task* develops constructive strategies of action and engages in reflective conversation with feedback that emerges when they are enacted. Asking “How might we respond?” this task leads to servant leadership.

Osmer pictures the four tasks in a hermeneutical circle, with each informing, interacting with and interpenetrating the others.¹⁰ Each task is reflected in a research question addressed in the thesis project:

1. What can be learned from the experience of the Meserete Kristos Church about leadership formation and performance under persecution?
2. What theoretical models or concepts can be used to explore and explain leadership under the pressure of persecution?
3. What biblical and theological resources help frame this phenomenon from a Christian perspective?
4. What can the global church – in contexts of persecution as well as relative freedom and security – learn from the leadership experience of the Meserete Kristos that could strengthen its faithfulness and witness to Jesus Christ?

¹⁰ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 6, 46-49; Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 1-29.

C. Definitions of terms

1. Persecution

There has been lively debate about the meaning of “persecution,” described by Abhijit Nayak as “a vaguely-defined omnibus word.” Charles Tieszen observes that persecution studies often suffer from inadequate definition. Some assume that “persecution” describes phenomena limited to the New Testament era and/or a future eschatological period. More commonly it is defined too broadly or too narrowly. Some not only restrict the term “persecution” to physical violence, but resist applying it to anything short of martyrdom.¹¹ Without going quite so far, the late Beijing house-church leader Allen Yuan argued that, “No Christian can truly call themselves persecuted unless they have been in jail for their faith. *Persecution* is an extreme term. You have to be beaten, thrown in jail, or lose your life. That’s persecution. Merely to have lost a career – that’s unfortunate, but it’s not persecution.”¹²

At the other end of the spectrum are those who use the term for all types of suffering, naming any unfortunate experience befalling Christians “persecution.” Keith Bateman notes that westerners tend to use hyperbole and, “As people generally unaccustomed to suffering as a result of our faith, there is sometimes the temptation to overreact to even the slightest misfortunes, labeling them persecution, when in fact that may not be the case at all.” Biblically, Christians can expect to be persecuted as a result of their faith in Jesus Christ. Ronald Boyd-MacMillan observes that the New Testament uses the word “persecution” to describe a wide range of experience, including mockery, slander, disparagement, excommunication and contemptuous treatment.¹³ A satisfactory definition, then, needs to acknowledge this broader realm of suffering without trivializing the word. Bateman suggests that persecution, at a minimum, must be 1) personally costly; 2) unjust and undeserved; and 3) a direct result of one’s faith in Christ. Anything less – however inconvenient or annoying – would simply be harassment. Still, he clarifies:

I would suggest that the one who undeservedly loses his or her job, or is denied academic tenure, or deserved promotion, or faces other discrimination because of his or her testimony is not simply being harassed. He or she is being persecuted. The one who is the center of office jokes, snide

¹¹ Abhijit Nayak, “By Suffering and Blood: God’s Mission in Contexts of Persecution and Martyrdom,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 48, no. 3 (July 2012): 274-281; Charles L. Tieszen, “Redefining Persecution,” in *Sorrow and Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom*, eds. William D. Taylor, Antonia van der Meer and Reg Reimer (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2012):41-47.

¹² Boyd-MacMillan, *Faith that Endures*, 87.

¹³ J. Keith Bateman, “Symposium on Persecution: Don’t Call It Persecution When It’s Not,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 49, no. 1 (January 2013): 54-62; Boyd-MacMillan, *Faith that Endures*, 114; Tieszen, “Redefining Persecution,” 41, 44. See Matthew 5:11–12, 10:22; John 15:20; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12.

remarks, and ostracism as a direct result of his or her faith is being persecuted. This person has chosen to acknowledge Christ openly and has suffered the consequences.¹⁴

After surveying definitions of persecution from the human rights community, and considering biblical teaching, Boyd-MacMillan offers a succinct, broad definition: “Christian persecution is any hostility, experienced from the world, as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile feelings, attitudes, words and actions.”¹⁵ While generally helpful, this definition extends too far. It meets Bateman’s second and third criteria, but not the first. If someone harbours hostile feelings toward a disciple of Jesus because of their faith, treating them with coolness yet respect, has persecution taken place? Though one might wish for a warmer relationship, one has not suffered harm and cannot claim persecution.

Affirming Bateman’s criteria in a forum on persecution in the *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Patrick Sookhdeo argues that communities as well as individuals can be targets of persecution. For example, when there is a ban on constructing new church buildings or loudspeakers of minarets are turned toward nearby churches to drown out the sound of Christian worship with the Muslim call to prayer, the congregation as a whole is not only being harassed but persecuted. Tieszen offers what is probably the most comprehensive, carefully considered series of definitions of persecution. His general definition meets Bateman’s first two criteria (that persecution is personally costly and unjust) and takes into account the reality that communities as well as individuals may be persecuted, labelling persecution as: “An unjust action of varying levels of hostility with one or more motivations, directed at a specific individual or a specific group of individuals, resulting in varying levels of harm as they are considered from the victim’s perspective.”¹⁶

Tieszen recognizes that persecution may be motivated by a variety of prejudices, not necessarily religious, and so this general definition includes no reference to faith in Christ. He proceeds to develop a more specific definition of religious persecution, building on the above statement, and then further clarifies the nature of persecution against followers of Jesus Christ, defining it as:

Any unjust action of mild to intense levels of hostility, with one or more motivations, directed at Christians of varying levels of commitment, resulting in varying levels of harm, which may not

¹⁴ Bateman, “Don’t Call It Persecution When It’s Not,” 54-62.

¹⁵ Boyd-MacMillan, *Faith that Endures*, 114.

¹⁶ Patrick Sookhdeo, “Response: We Need to Add to the Definition,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, 49, no. 1 (January 2013): 54-62. Christof Sauer, “Researching Persecution and Martyrdom,” *International Journal of Religious Freedom*, 1, no. 1 (2008): 26-48; Tieszen, “Redefining Persecution,” 42; Tieszen’s definition is adopted by Sauer, ed., “Bad Urach Statement.”

necessarily prevent or limit these Christians' ability to practice their faith or appropriately propagate their faith, as it is considered from the victim's perspective, each motivation having religion, namely the identification of its victims as 'Christian', as its primary motivator.

By addressing issues of intensity, motivation, levels of commitment among targets of persecution, levels of harm and impact on Christian witness, Tieszen acknowledges the breadth of suffering which may be described as religious persecution of Christians. For purposes of brevity, however, he offers a simplified "standard definition," summarizing the religious persecution of Christians as: "Any unjust action of varying levels of hostility perpetrated primarily on the basis of religion and directed at Christians, resulting in varying levels of harm as it is considered from the victim's perspective."¹⁷

While adopting Tieszen's definitions and recognizing the range of phenomena which may rightly be described as persecution, this study focuses on leaders in a context of relatively severe persecution, in which church assets were seized by government, worship and evangelism forbidden, members harassed, and leaders in particular faced the risk of job loss, arrest and martyrdom.

2. Leadership

The challenge of defining leadership is well-documented. Over time scholars and practitioners have shifted emphasis from the ability of leaders to command and control to personality traits of leaders, behaviour, skill and relational aspects of leadership. Scholars continue to debate its meaning. In his survey of leadership theory, Peter Northouse identifies essential components for building a definition: Leadership is a) a process, b) involves influence, c) occurs in groups, and d) involves common goals.¹⁸

Leadership takes place within a dynamic web of relationship involving leaders, followers, context, vision and God. Too often, "leadership" has been understood as "dominance." James MacGregor Burns describes a common ambivalence arising from this, observing, "We search eagerly for leadership yet seek to cage and tame it." When leadership is confused with "naked power-wielding," people are not only hurt; their capacity to contribute toward a shared vision is greatly stifled. Margaret Wheatley likewise contends that even with no intent to misuse others, "command and control" leadership practices do not produce long-term positive change in the real world, but result in followers' disengaging from work, few successes in

¹⁷ Tieszen, "Redefining Persecution," 42, 45.

¹⁸ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2013), 2-5, surveys the attempt to define leadership over more than a century, drawing on the work of J. C. Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Praeger, 1991), who analysed more than 200 definitions of leadership articulated between 1900 and 1990.

problem-solving and scapegoating leaders when things go wrong. In his seminal work, Burns argues that leadership must consider the motivations, needs and goals of both leaders and followers.¹⁹

Some, like Oswald Sanders and John Maxwell, have defined leadership simply as *influence*.²⁰

While leadership cannot exist without influence, this factor alone is inadequate; a crying baby may exercise great influence on a family, but is not thereby leading. In describing leadership as a *process*, Northouse rejects the idea that influence flows in linear, one-way action from leader to follower; rather, it is an interactive dynamic expressed in a group. It is possible, then, for anyone to exercise leadership, not only formally designated leaders.²¹ Including group context in his definition underscores that leadership cannot be practiced in isolation from others; groups, of course, can be as small as two.

To what extent does leadership, by definition, require the actual attainment of goals? Burns states that “The ultimate test of practical leadership is the realization of intended, real change that meets people’s enduring needs.” Henry and Richard Blackaby likewise insist that “Leadership is ultimately measured not according to the leader’s skills but on the leader’s results,” and dismiss any attempt to define leadership apart from the full and complete attainment of God’s goals for a group. It is not enough, they argue, to say with Robert Clinton that “The central task of leadership is influencing God’s people toward God’s purposes.” Leaders need to go all the way, albeit with the help and power of Holy Spirit.²²

While perseverance toward a goal is an indispensable mark of faithful leadership, leaders – particularly those who are persecuted – function in contexts of uncertainty, contending with a plethora of factors and pressures beyond their control. Additionally, there is an inherent incompleteness in many leadership tasks. While seeking God-honouring results, Christian leaders will trust the outcome of their labour to God. Northouse’s definition is simple and workable: “Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.”²³

¹⁹ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 9-28, 462; Margaret J. Wheatley, *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain time* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2007), 64.

²⁰ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 27, “Leadership is the ability of one person to influence others.”; John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Most Powerful Minutes in a Leader’s Day: Revitalize Your Spirit and Empower Your Leadership* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 17, “Leadership is influence; nothing more or nothing less.”

²¹ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 3.

²² Burns, *Leadership*, 461; Henry Blackaby, and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001), 19-21.

²³ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 3; John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 232, observes that “The key to the obedience of God’s people is

What, then, is *Christian* leadership?

In view of the key role that leaders play – whether in the family, marketplace, nation or church, from the centre or the margins – a cluster of foundational questions emerge: *Whom do leaders follow? Whose agenda do they pursue? Whose glory do they seek?* God-honouring leadership is grounded in followership. Blackaby and Blackaby define “spiritual leadership” as “moving people on to God’s agenda.”²⁴ Succinct and compelling, their definition implies that leadership is a process, involves influence, occurs within a group context and strives toward a particular goal (God’s agenda). At the same time, it lacks precision about these components of leadership and how it is exercised. Arthur Boers integrates the key elements of Northouse’s definition with distinctive dimensions of a biblically informed vocation, defining Christian leadership as, “Inspiring, challenging, or empowering people or groups to join God’s mission of redemption and healing.”²⁵ James Lawrence more explicitly incorporates Northouse’s four components into a definition of Christian leadership, also addressing the importance of a servant stance, obedience to God, reliance on God-given assets and abilities, and like Boers, a focus on goals congruent with the mission and kingdom of God: “Christian leadership is a servant-oriented relational process whereby those who lead, under God’s leadership, using their God-given capacity seek to influence others towards a kingdom-honouring goal.”²⁶ While the term “servant-oriented” captures one dimension of Jesus’ character, it may be helpful to recognize Jesus more explicitly as a model for Christian leadership. Although it is true that all leadership (indeed, any human action!) is offered using “God-given capacity,” it seems unnecessary to include here. This study, then, adopts the following definition:

Christian leadership is a relational process, offered in the Spirit of Jesus under his authority, influencing others to pursue a goal aligned with God’s priorities and mission.²⁷

D. Overview of the thesis project

The next chapter surveys literature pertaining to leadership under persecution and transformational leadership theory (focusing on Robert E. Quinn’s authentic transformational theory), laying groundwork

not their effectiveness but their patience....The relationship between the obedience of God’s people and the triumph of God’s cause is not a relationship of cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection....”

²⁴ Blackaby, and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 20.

²⁵ Arthur Boers, *Servants and Fools: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2015), 161.

²⁶ James Lawrence, “Leadership Matters,” Session 1 PowerPoint Presentation for *Growing Leaders Course* (Warwick, United Kingdom: Church Pastoral Aid Society, 2007).

²⁷ Author’s definition.

for *descriptive-empirical* and *interpretative* tasks, and less directly, the *pragmatic* task. The third chapter introduces literature relevant for the *normative* task, sketching a biblical theology of leadership under persecution. Chapter four further describes and interprets the social, religious and political context of the case. The following chapter on methodology includes discussion of qualitative research, advantages and limits of case study, selection of research participants, the process and content of interviews, reflexivity, ethical issues, and data analysis. Chapter six presents a detailed analysis of primary sources using categories emerging inductively from the data as well as from the theoretical framework and interview questions, using *constant comparison* in category construction. The four dimensions of Robert Quinn's theory of the Fundamental State of Leadership – purpose, internal motivation, other focus, and external openness – provide a broad structure for reporting research findings. In preparation for the *pragmatic task*, the final chapter summarizes learning from this study, considers its relevance for the global church and identifies areas for further research.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW: LEADERSHIP THEORY

As an academic field, practical theology has great potential to yield fresh discoveries of God's ongoing work in the world, encouraging and equipping the church for more faithful witness to Jesus Christ amid contemporary realities. The widespread experience of persecution in the global church and the challenges of leadership under such conditions surely call for sustained attention. This case study of leadership in the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) during the persecution of the Derg regime engages in the four tasks of practical theology identified by Richard Osmer, anchoring each in the study of precedent literature and field research.¹ The survey of literature in this chapter lays the groundwork for *descriptive-empirical* and *interpretative* tasks, and less directly, the *pragmatic* task. The first section focuses primarily on description, exploring literature addressing leadership under persecution. The second part considers transformational leadership theory, particularly Robert E. Quinn's concept of the "Fundamental State of Leadership," as a lens for interpretation. The following chapter, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives," introduces literature relevant for the *normative* task. The fourth chapter, "Historical and Cultural Context," further describes and interprets the social, religious and political contours of the case in preparation for an analysis of MKC leadership experience between 1974 and 1991.

What is already understood about leadership formation and performance under the pressure of persecution? In what ways and to what extent have the patterns and dynamics of leadership in such contexts of crisis been studied? What theoretical models or concepts are relevant for exploring and explaining leadership under persecution?

A. Leadership under persecution

Christians have been writing about church experience under persecution since the formation of the New Testament. In the first three centuries after Christ, the church produced abundant literature on the topic, concentrated on martyrdom, designed to encourage believers to persevere through suffering. Eusebius' *History of the Church*, the first of its kind, gives special attention to persecution. In the wake of

¹ Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

the Reformation, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, Lutheran, Calvinist, Puritan and Anabaptist Christians all produced martyr histories, each focusing primarily on their own group.²

Many biographies of persecuted Christians, country-specific accounts of the suffering church, biblical and theological reflection, and statistical studies on the topic of persecution have been published in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.³ Advocacy organizations like *Open Doors International*, *Voice of the Martyrs*, the *Religious Liberty Commission* of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and Freedom House's *Center for Religious Freedom* regularly publicize incidents of religious persecution.

The past fifteen years have seen rising interest in Christian persecution, suffering, violence and martyrdom. Ronald Boyd-MacMillan's 2006 book, *Faith that Endures: The essential guide to the persecuted church*, lives up to its name as a comprehensive treatment of contemporary persecution for popular audiences. A strong advocate of learning from the persecuted, Boyd-MacMillan maintains that encounter with persecuted Christians can strengthen the faith of those in freer, more comfortable settings.⁴ Academic resources on persecution have also mushroomed. In five outstanding collections – *The suffering body: Responding to the persecution of Christians* (2006), *Missions in Contexts of Violence* (2008), *Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom: Theological Reflections* (2010), *Sorrow and Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom* (2012), *Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission* (2015) – more than a hundred and thirty authors have contributed 150 essays or chapters exploring persecution through diverse lenses: mission, historical case study, contexts of persecution, biblical studies, theology, demographics and statistics, practical support, healing trauma, the function of research and more. In 2008, the WEA's International Institute for Religious Freedom established the *International Journal for*

² Carl A. Volz, *Pastoral Life and Practice in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), 145-146; Thomas Schirrmacher, *The Persecution of Christians Concerns Us All: Towards a Theology of Martyrdom* (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2008), 24-25, 40.

³ Christof Sauer, *International Bibliography on Religious Freedom and Persecution, English* (Bonn: International Institute for Religious Freedom, 2004).

⁴ Reg Reimer, "Christian Responses to Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom," in *Sorrow and Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom*, eds. William D. Taylor, Antonia van der Meer and Reg Reimer (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2012): 23-30; Schirrmacher, *The Persecution of Christians Concerns Us All*, 21-22, notes that various evangelical conferences in the 1970's and 80's and the *International Day of Prayer for Persecuted Christians* raised the profile of the persecuted church among Western Christians. Ronald Boyd-MacMillan, *Faith that Endures: The Essential Guide to the Persecuted Church* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2006), 301-341, suggests that testimonies of persecuted Christians force us to ask, "Am I walking in the way of the cross?" (Faith model), "Am I in enough trouble for Jesus?" (Faith warning), and "Is my God big enough?" (Faith boost)

Religious Freedom (IJRF) as a forum for scholarly discourse on religious freedom in general and the persecution of Christians in particular.⁵ There is clearly important research and reflection taking place.

Still, the study of *leadership* within the persecuted church has largely been neglected. Biographies and other accounts of persecution tell stories of leaders and offer glimpses into their leadership, of course.⁶ There have been few attempts, however, to explore the nature and challenge of leadership itself in such contexts. IJRF editors Christof Sauer and Thomas Schirrmacher encourage further research into issues surrounding the suffering, persecution and martyrdom of Christians and identify academic fields with potential to make valuable contributions, including theology, ethics, missiology, church history, social sciences, law, human rights studies, political science, international relations, peace and conflict studies, and psychology.⁷ Although their list is not intended to be exhaustive, it is nonetheless striking that leadership studies receive no mention – consistent with its absence in most literature on persecution.

A notable exception to this neglect of leadership in persecution studies is Nguyen Huu Cuong's 1995 dissertation, "The Growth of Certain Protestant Churches in Saigon under the Vietnamese Communist Government from 1975," which credits the robust, courageous faith of pastors, lay leaders and other believers for the thriving ministry of three churches under persecution. Relying on the Holy Spirit, leaders demonstrated passion for evangelism, freedom in the Lord, fervent prayer, shrewd assessments of the political and cultural context, love for persecutors, and willingness to suffer for the sake of Jesus and the

⁵ Keith E. Eitel, ed., *Missions in Contexts of Violence* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2008); Harold D. Hunter, and Cecil M. Robeck, eds., *The Suffering Body: Responding to the Persecution of Christians* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006); Hans Aage Gravaas et al., *Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2015); Christof Sauer, and Richard Howell, eds., *Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom: Theological Reflections*, Religious Freedom Series, 2, (Johannesburg: AcadSA Publishing, 2010); Taylor, van der Meer and Reimer, eds., *Sorrow and Blood*; Thomas Schirrmacher and Christof Sauer, "Editorial," *International Journal for Religious Freedom*, 1, no. 1 (2008):5-9.

⁶ For example, Ken Anderson, *Bold as a Lamb: Pastor Samuel Lamb and the Underground Church of China* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan: 1991); Barnabas Mam, and Kitty Murray, *Church Behind the Wire: A story of Faith in the Killing Fields* (Chicago: Moody, 2012); Greg Musselman, and Trevor Lund, *Closer to the Fire: Lessons from the Persecuted Church* (Bartlesville, OK: Genesis, 2012); Oscar Romero, *A Shepherd's Diary*, trans. Irene B. Hodgson (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1993); Herbert Schossberg, *Called to Suffer, Called to Triumph* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1990); Liao Yiwu, *God is Red: The Secret Story of How Christianity Survived and Flourished in Communist China*, trans. Wenguang Huang (New York: Harper One, 2011); Brother Yun and Paul Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man: The Remarkable True Story of Chinese Christian Brother Yun* (Grand Rapids, Monarch, 2002). Nik Ripken, with Gregg Lewis, *The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2015), offers a particularly compelling account of a mission veteran's experience of learning from persecuted Christians "how to follow Jesus, how to love Jesus, and how to walk with Him day by day," based on interviews with more than six hundred believers in sixty countries,

⁷ Christof Sauer and Thomas Schirrmacher, "The Place and Function of Academics," in *Sorrow and Blood*, 461-466.

gospel. Three case studies testify to remarkable leadership among persecuted yet joyful missional churches. Even so, Cuong's thesis is not a study of leadership per se.⁸

Other studies also explore the experience of persecuted pastors without focussing on the dynamics of leadership. Based on Cuban research, Kurt Nelson's 2008 Doctor of Ministry thesis, "Finishing Well: Encouraging Pastors to Persevere under Persecution," makes a valuable contribution toward understanding positive and negative impacts of persecution upon pastors as well as factors that enable them to continue functioning under persecution.⁹ Analyzing interviews with nine Chinese pastors imprisoned by the communist government between 1949 and 1980 because of their evangelical activities, Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting and Terri Watson identify themes in three areas: the nature of their suffering losses, ways of responding and coping, and personal transformation as a result of their experience.¹⁰

Three doctoral theses on leadership development in persecuted Chinese house churches explore challenges in that context, but are less concerned with describing and understanding local experience than testing viable leadership formation strategies for Chinese churches. Esther Yang's "A Call to Lead," measures the effectiveness of her efforts to communicate the core values of her ministry to a fellowship of house church leaders in China. Jong Keol Yoo's "Training Chinese House Church Leaders," examines the critical need for theological education in Chinese house churches and identifies ten factors to consider when outsiders (such as Western missionaries) develop strategies to assist with this. Kai-Yum Cheung-Teng's "An Analysis of the Current Needs of House Churches in China to Improve the Effectiveness of Leadership Development" also focuses on the theological education of Chinese house church leaders, particularly as a strategy to combat the influence of indigenous heresies. None give significant attention to learning about effective leadership from persecuted leaders themselves.¹¹

⁸ Nguyen Huu Cuong, "The Growth of Certain Protestant Churches in Saigon under the Vietnamese Communist Government from 1975" (D.Min. diss., San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1995).

⁹ Kurt Nelson, "Finishing Well: Encouraging Pastors to Persevere under Persecution" (D.Min. diss., Columbia International University, 2008).

¹⁰ Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting, and Terri Watson, "Is Suffering Good? An Explorative Study on the Religious Persecution among Chinese Pastors," *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 35, no. 3 (September 2007): 202-210. Suffering included losses of personal freedom, physical trauma, spiritual isolation, and collapse of social support. Participants responded and coped through experiences of God's presence, letting go and surrender to God, identifying with the passion of the Christ and his disciples, preparing to suffer, normalizing their suffering, worshipping and reciting Scriptures, fellowships and family support, and believing in a greater purpose. Ting and Watson identify four themes of personal transformation: a switch from focusing on self to the churches, and embrace of humility and limits within oneself, increased trust in God's provision, and redefining their views on suffering.

¹¹ Esther X. Yang, "A Call to Lead: A Study on Communicating the Core Values of the China Ministry to the Leadership of the Full Life Christian Fellowship in China" (D.Min. thesis, Ashland Theological Seminary, 2002); Jong

Open Doors International has developed a three-day seminar for church members and leaders in settings where Christians are pressured to compromise their faith and vocation. Offered in more than twenty-seven languages, *Standing Strong through the Storms* is based on learning from persecuted Christians. In their book of the same name, Paul Estabrooks and Jim Cunningham insisted, based *Open Doors'* fifty years of ministry among Christians persecuted for their faith, that many persecuted believers "have far more to teach us about the application of biblical truth to everyday living than we can contribute to them." Reflecting a mix of biblical and practical wisdom, the curriculum and book communicate relevant teaching about the nature of persecution, dimensions of spiritual warfare, the indispensability of the Bible, prayer and the Holy Spirit, perseverance, servant leadership, witness to Christ, the way of the cross and the mission of the church and family. While not a study of leadership, it is a valuable resource for leaders in the persecuted church.¹²

B. Leading with Lift: Robert E. Quinn's Fundamental State of Leadership

Although the literature on leadership is indisputably vast, almost all published theory in the field arises from relatively secure, free, entrepreneurial contexts.¹³ The case of leadership in the Meserete Kristos Church from 1974-1991 diverges from the predominant context for leadership theory in two obvious ways: its location in a non-Western culture and the conditions of persecution. Although some of the literature cited in chapter four sheds light on critical dimensions of the historical and cultural context of this case, the process of developing and articulating contextually relevant leadership theory in and for non-Western cultures is in its infancy. In addition, the growing field of research into the persecuted church has not yet begun to address the topic of leadership with any sustained attention, much less develop theory in this area.

What theoretical framework, then, is appropriate for studying leadership under persecution in Ethiopia – a cultural and political setting considerably unlike the Western democratic context in which almost all prevailing theory has been developed? Every theoretical lens obscures some dimension of reality

Keol Yoo, "Training Chinese House Church Leaders: Factors Influencing Leadership Development Strategies" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005); Kai-Yum Cheung-Teng, "An Analysis of the Current Needs of House Churches in China to Improve the Effectiveness of Leadership Development" (D.Min. diss., Trinity International University, 2006).

¹² Paul Estabrooks, "Preparing both Church and Missionaries: Global North," in *Sorrow and Blood*, 351-356; Paul Estabrooks, and Jim Cunningham, *Standing Strong through the Storm* (Santa Ana, CA: Open Doors International, 2004), 8.

¹³ Mark Gerzon, *Leading Through Conflict: How Successful Leaders Transform Differences into Opportunities* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2006), 133-134, 255, n. 25; Marcus W. Dickson et al., "Conceptualizing Leadership across Cultures," *Journal of World Business*, 47, no. 4 (October 2012): 188.

even as it brings clarity to others; the potential for muddled vision is surely heightened when applying a conceptual model in a setting significantly different from the one in which it was conceived. Still, one cannot walk into the research field lens-free; some framework is required to focus the investigation.

As a professor of business administration, management and organizations at the University of Michigan, Robert E. Quinn has developed and practiced leadership theory in an American milieu quite unlike that experienced by persecuted church leaders in Ethiopia. Co-creator of the widely accepted *Competing Values Framework* and founding member of the Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship, Quinn has more than thirty years of experience consulting with major corporations and government agencies. Still, in his exploration of effective leadership in crisis, he offers a compelling theory applicable beyond corporate boardrooms. Such circumstances, Quinn argues, invite men and women to shift from normal self-centred behaviour to the “Fundamental State of Leadership” in which they exercise transformational influence, functioning with increasing purpose, integrity, love and creativity.

Within the field of leadership theory, Quinn’s work can be characterized as *authentic transformational*, conversant with *complexity* theory, and situated within the emergent discipline of *positive organizational scholarship*. Placing his work in these contexts, this review focuses on the development of Quinn’s concepts of *deep change*, *advanced change theory*, and the *Fundamental State of Leadership*, interacting with critiques of his work and exploring the relevance of his thinking for the study of church leadership under persecution.

1. Authentic transformational leadership

James MacGregor Burns’ seminal *Leadership*¹⁴ gave birth to the transformational leadership paradigm in 1978, animated by a hopeful vision of a more just, free and prosperous world. Grounded in robust convictions about human dignity, purpose and ethics, Burns makes a sharp distinction between “leadership” and “naked power-wielding,” arguing that leadership must necessarily be concerned with the motivations, needs and goals of both leaders and followers. Whereas *transactional* leadership entails an exchange between leader and followers, *transformational* leaders create a connection with followers that raises the level of motivation and morality in leader and follower. Peter Northouse describes transformational leadership as “a process that changes and transforms people” and “is concerned with

¹⁴ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals. It includes assessing followers' motives, satisfying their needs, and treating them as full human beings. Transformational leadership involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them."¹⁵

Extending the work of Burns, Bernard Bass and Ronald Riggio identify four components of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Although they do not have conditions of persecution in mind, Bass and Riggio argue that practices of transformational leadership contribute to effectiveness under stress. Leaders who exercise idealized influence, for example, tend to remain calm under threat. Not easily frightened, they maintain a sense of humour, while demonstrating perseverance, decisiveness and commitment. Followers under pressure particularly need the inspiration of a compelling vision and confidence in leaders' credibility. Intellectual stimulation enables creative response to stressful situations. Individualized consideration builds a supportive climate for followers to learn and grow through crisis. Bass and Riggio posit that transactional leaders are less able to help followers cope with uncertain circumstances due to their own reactive behaviour and dependence on established rules to maintain and control systems; in contrast, transformational leaders are proactive, ready to break with tradition, offer innovative solutions and institutionalize new adaptive arrangements.¹⁶

Affirming Burns' conviction that such transformational leadership is, by definition, a moral enterprise, Bass and Riggio distinguish between that which is *authentic* (morally uplifting) and *inauthentic* (pseudo transformational). Whereas pseudo transformational leaders tend to be self-concerned, self-aggrandizing, exploitative and power-oriented, authentic transformational leaders transcend self-interest, act with integrity, develop others and empower them.¹⁷

A more recent emphasis in leadership research focuses on the authenticity of leaders and their leadership apart from the transformational paradigm. Northouse observes that interest in *authentic leadership* rose in the United States following the terrorist attacks of September 2001 amid widespread corporate corruption and a troubled economy, a time of heightened uncertainty and anxiety about

¹⁵ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 6th ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2013), 185.

¹⁶ Bernard M. Bass, and Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 2nd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006), 5-7, 57-80.

¹⁷ Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 12-16.

leadership. Drawing from the fields of leadership, positive organizational scholarship and ethics, theorists have begun to define authentic leadership and identify its characteristics. Some focus on the *intrapersonal* authenticity of the leader, giving attention to leaders' self-knowledge, self-regulation and self-concept. Others view authentic leadership as an *interpersonal* process, highlighting its relational character as it is created by leaders and followers together. Still others emphasize the *developmental* character of authentic leadership; rather than a fixed quality or trait, it is something to be nurtured in a leader.¹⁸

The word *authentic*, then, is used in the literature both to qualify *transformational* leadership and as an emerging approach to leadership in its own right. Recent dissertations by Peter Brennan and Thomas Nichols compare transformational and authentic leadership theories and advocate for their compatibility.¹⁹

For Quinn, authenticity is at the heart of transformational leadership, with the leader's own person the pivot point for leading change in the world. In *Deep Change*, he recognizes all people as potential leaders with the capacity to change the larger system or organization of which they are a part. The ability to effectively lead *organizational* change is not primarily about technique but one's readiness to embrace personal change, learning "that we can change the world only by changing ourselves."²⁰

Quinn argues that organizational leaders tend to seek incremental change through rational analysis and planning, attempting to control future outcomes through slight modifications of past performance. To thrive in a complex rapidly changing world, however, organizations often need to undergo *deep change*: "major in scope, discontinuous with the past and generally irreversible." The alternative is *slow death*, caused by the entropy of personal and organizational routines no longer aligned with changing external realities. Deep change disrupts established patterns of action, entails risk and requires leaders to surrender control. "This is usually a terrifying choice," Quinn observes, "often involving a 'dark night of the soul.'"²¹

Quinn envisions this pursuit of excellence as a dynamic process for both individuals and organizations – a transformational cycle with four distinct phases: 1) *initiation*, in which an individual or

¹⁸ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 253-286.

¹⁹ Peter T. Brennan, "*Pursuing Success without Scandal: Exploring the Relationship between Transformational and Authentic Leadership*" (Ph.D. diss., Capella University, 2010), and Thomas W. Nichols, "*Authentic Transformational Leadership and Implicit Leadership Theories*" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Texas, 2008).

²⁰ Robert E. Quinn, *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 9. This is congruent with Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 65, who observe that transformational leadership does not depend on positional authority and can therefore be practiced by anyone in a crisis. They note that informal leadership often emerges when designated authorities are unable to function – a condition often experienced by persecuted churches.

²¹ Quinn, *Deep Change*, 3-6.

group desires to change and develops a vision without knowing if it can be implemented; 2) *uncertainty*, in which change agents engage in intense, intuitive experimentation, taking risks despite potential discomfort and frustration in order to gain creative insight; 3) *transformation*, in which previously contradictory elements of the system are integrated into a new paradigm, resulting in synergistic, effective functioning; and 4) *routinization* as tasks are mastered and change participants experience a more stable equilibrium. Significant dangers threaten to disrupt the cycle in each phase. *Initiation* may be interrupted if a person or group pursues an illusory vision that cannot be implemented. Participants may become diverted from the cycle at the *uncertainty* phase by falling into a state of panic. Exhaustion is a common danger in the *transformational* phase, and *routinization* carries the potential for stagnation.²²

To successfully lead change in an organization or society, leaders must face their own fear of change and lack of personal integrity – which Quinn argues is ubiquitous and is typically seen as undiscussable. By becoming honest about their own integrity gaps, however, leaders gain moral authority and an increased capacity to function as internally driven visionaries. Quinn insists that “To thwart our defense mechanisms and bypass slow death, we must confront first our own hypocrisy and cowardice. We must recognize the lies we have been telling ourselves. We must acknowledge our own weakness, greed, insensitivity, and lack of vision and courage. If we do so, we begin to understand the clear need for a course correction, and we slowly begin to reinvent our self.”²³

Because systemic change involves sacrifice and suffering for all participants, leaders need to model what it means to prioritize shared vision over personal survival. Quinn writes that for leaders, “Their credibility is their behavioral integrity, the alignment of every action with the vision. People watch their leaders and quickly recognize the leader’s personal discipline and commitment. If the leader’s words are empty, they ignore the vision until it dies.” A leader’s courage and integrity, then, galvanizes the commitment of others. His or her own willingness “to get lost with confidence,” “travelling naked into the land of uncertainty,” inspires others to take similar risks: “They, too, are willing to take deep personal risks and follow their leader’s direction because the leader believes in the vision, to the point that personal failure, firing or assassination is acceptable.”²⁴

²² Quinn, *Deep Change*, 167-169.

²³ Quinn, *Deep Change*, 73-81, 127.

²⁴ Quinn, *Deep Change*, 12, 93-96, 125-128.

2. Complexity theory

Working within an authentic transformational leadership paradigm, Quinn draws on complexity theory to understand the context in which change occurs. In both physical and social sciences, this perspective moves away from linear, mechanistic views of the world. Rather than seeking simple cause-and-effect solutions, the “new science” understands reality as non-linear and organic, characterized by uncertainty and unpredictability. Donde Plowman et al. observe that the study of leadership in organizations has often been characterized by false certainty, not only assuming that effective leaders should know what is going to happen next, but that they can eliminate ambiguity from organizational life. Those who lead persecuted churches surely carry no such illusions. Leadership informed by complexity theory recognizes the productive potential of “organized disorder” in which dynamic things happen at multiple locales within the system.²⁵

Quinn joins theorists and practitioners like Dee Hock, Richard Pascale, Mark Millemann, Linda Gioja, Margaret Wheatley and Mark Youngblood who stress the potential for richly creative change when organizations live “at the edge of chaos,” embracing principles of self-organization and empowering group members to lead boldly from their own position. Whereas leaders in stagnating, comfortable organizations may need to disturb the equilibrium of the system in order to promote healthy change,²⁶ persecuted churches tend to experience a perpetual state of disequilibrium.

According to Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber, *complexity leadership* suggests that to achieve optimal performance, organizations cannot rely on simple, rationalized structures that underestimate the complexity of the context in which they must function and adapt. Similarly, Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom argue that in times of radical cultural change and external attack, decentralized organizations with widely shared leadership have a strong advantage over centralized structures dependent on rigidly

²⁵ Russ Marion, and Mary Uhl-Bien, “Leadership in Complex Organizations,” *The Leadership Quarterly*, 12, no. 4 (Winter 2001):389-418; Donde Ashmos Plowman et al., “The Role of Leadership in Emergent, Self-organization,” *The Leadership Quarterly*, 18, no. 4 (August 2007): 341-356.

²⁶ Dee Hock, *One from Many: Visa and the Rise of the Chaordic Organization* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005); Richard T. Pascale, Mark Millemann, and Linda Gioja, *Surfing the Edge of Chaos: The Laws of Nature and the New Laws of Business* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2006); and Mark Youngblood, *Life at the Edge of Chaos: Creating the Quantum Organization* (Dallas: Perceval, 1997).

hierarchical governance.²⁷ Still, Quinn argues that even in stubbornly change-resistant organizations, men and women have the capacity to provoke (but not control) deep change if they are willing to first experience it themselves. This may require great courage as leaders “walk naked into the land of uncertainty” toward a better future. Effective leadership, for Quinn, requires a transformation of self, based on a readiness to confront personal gaps in integrity in order to lead self, others and organizations away from the entropy of *slow death* into life-giving *deep change*.

3. Advanced Change Theory

Quinn fleshes out the concept of deep change with his “Advanced Change Theory” (ACT), introduced in contributions to *The Leader’s Change Handbook*, *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *Handbook of Organization Development*, and his book, *Change the World: How Ordinary People can Accomplish Extraordinary Results*.²⁸ In the first published treatment of ACT, Quinn works with Nancy Snyder to explore dynamics of organizational change. Drawing on Ronald Heifetz’s distinction between technical and adaptive challenges, they identify the need for deep change in human systems. Whereas technical problems can be solved with existing expertise and technique, adaptive challenges have no existing solution, but often require those affected to make painful adjustments in their attitudes, work habits and lives.²⁹

Quinn contrasts the deep transformational approach of ACT with three conventional change strategies identified by R. Chin and K. D. Benne in their seminal 1969 paper on organizational development, “General Strategies for Effecting Changes in Human Systems.” Aspiring change agents typically begin with an emphasis on *facts* in the *telling* or *empirical–rational* approach, making logical

²⁷ Bruce J. Avolio, Fred O Walumbwa, and Todd J. Weber, “Leadership: Current Theories, Research, and Future Directions,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 60 (2009): 421-449; Ori Brafman and Rod A. Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

²⁸ Robert E. Quinn, and Nancy T. Snyder, “Advanced Change Theory: Culture Change at Whirlpool Corporation,” in *The Change Leader’s Handbook: An Essential Guide to Setting Direction and Taking Action*, ed. Jay A. Conger, Gretchen M. Spreitzer and Edward E. Lawler III (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999): 162-194, note the foundations for ACT were first proposed in R. E. Quinn, M. Brown and G. M. Spreitzer, “The Empowering Self Modification Strategy: a Fourth General Strategy for Effecting Changes in Human Systems,” an unpublished working paper available from the authors, 1998. Robert E. Quinn, Gretchen M Spreitzer, Matthew V. Brown, “Changing Others through Changing Ourselves: The Transformation of Human Systems,” *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 9, no. 2 (June 2000): 147-164 further refine ACT. The most comprehensive treatment is in Robert E. Quinn, *Change the World: How Ordinary People can Accomplish Extraordinary Results* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000); Robert E. Quinn, and Scott Sonenshein, “Four General Strategies for Changing Human Systems,” in *Handbook of Organization Development*, ed. Thomas G. Cummings (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008): 69-78, place ACT in the context of organizational development.

²⁹ Quinn and Snyder, “Advanced Change Theory,” 162; Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). Persecution surely represents an adaptive rather than a technical challenge for churches.

arguments why others should change. A second common change strategy emphasizes *authority* as those with positional leverage apply sanctions to alter the behaviour of change targets using the *forcing* or *power-coercive* approach. Less common is a third approach, emphasizing *relationship*; those engaging in the *participative* or *normative-re-educative* strategy use collaborative, open discussion to seek win-win outcomes. Often seen as counterintuitive, risky and time-consuming, the participative approach tends to be misunderstood and manipulated by those who find it difficult to reduce their control enough to join with others in learning and creating a shared solution.³⁰ Although Quinn values the potential for participative strategy to contribute to the adaptive process, he argues for a fourth, more transformative approach which both incorporates and transcends the three conventional strategies.³¹

Quinn, Spreitzer and Brown describe ACT as *advanced* because it is less observable and more complex than traditional change strategies of rational persuasion, coercion and participation. Used less often than “normal” change strategies, ACT tends to be misunderstood “because it transcends the assumptions of self-interested, transactional human behavior, which permeate more traditional change theories.” Convinced that changing the self can alter the external world, practitioners of ACT confront self-deception, act in faith, deal with paradox and surrender to an unproven vision in pursuit of a new future.³²

Quinn uses *seeds* as a metaphor for transformation. An acorn, for example, does not contain a small oak, but the code for a process that may one day produce a small oak. There is a sense in which planting an acorn triggers a determined outcome. If a tree comes into being, it will be an oak not a maple. In another sense, Quinn observes, the process is free, emergent or self-organizing. Many characteristics of the adult tree will depend on various unpredictable interactions with the environment. Similarly, Quinn describes ACT as a “process of seeding the transformation of human systems. It assumes that a small particle introduced into a human system at the right time may disrupt the system in a positive way....The

³⁰ Quinn, *Change the World*, 9-13, 225-229. The work of R. Chin and K. D. Benne, “General Strategies for Effecting Changes in Human Systems,” in ed. W. G. Bennis, K. D. Benne, and R. Chin, *The Planning of Change: Readings in Applied Behavioural Sciences* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969) is also cited in Quinn, et al., “Changing Others through Changing Ourselves,” 147-164, and Quinn and Sonenshein, “Four General Strategies for Changing Human Systems,” 69-78.

³¹ Quinn, et al., “Changing Others through Changing Ourselves,” 149, while affirming the value of *participative* strategy, observe that in some cases, such as Gandhi’s efforts to stop religious civil war between Hindus and Muslims in India, transformational change can happen without any dialogue at all.

³² Quinn, et al., “Changing Others through Changing Ourselves,” 148.

seed or particle that is the catalyst for such changes usually comes in the form of some sort of behavior that itself emerged from a seed-like thought.”³³

Based on moral authority rather than coercive power, ACT requires leaders to shift from prioritizing self-interested survival to instead 1) envision productive community, 2) look within, 3) acknowledge their own hypocrisy, 4) transcend external sanctions, 5) embody a vision of the common good, 6) disturb the system, 7) surrender to the emergent process, and 8) entice through moral power. Inner-directed and outer-focused transformational change agents provide inspiration and foundation for building productive communities by taking risks and challenging existing traditions and verities.³⁴

Faced with the choice between control and effectiveness, however, leaders normally choose the former – even when contrary to their stated intent and vision. Because hypocrisy and self-deception impair individual and collective growth, Quinn emphasizes that reducing gaps in personal integrity is essential for transformation. He cites research indicating that people and organizations will change when personal defenses, group norms and organizational culture are unfrozen. Drawing on the work of E. H. Schein, he clarifies that such change involves three processes: a) disconfirmation of expectations, b) induction of learning anxiety if the disconfirming data are accepted as valid and relevant, and c) provision of psychological safety that converts anxiety into motivation to change. Quinn observes that the second step is often negated because of a common fear that if one admits to self or others that something is wrong or imperfect, one will lose effectiveness, self-esteem and possibly identity. Given such risks, one’s defense mechanisms tend to shut down the change process, personally and collectively: “We claim we want progress, but we pursue the preservation of our current position.”³⁵

To observe transformational capacity, Quinn stresses the need to pay attention to people living by principle rather “normal people doing normal things.” As exemplars of his advanced change theory, Quinn points to Jesus Christ, Mohandas Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., each of whom was killed by opponents who resisted the message of change they embodied and proclaimed. Reaffirming the personal cost of authentic leadership, Quinn provocatively asserts that leadership means “Go forth and die.” If this is

³³ Quinn, *Change the World*, 2.

³⁴ Quinn, *Change the World*, 115.

³⁵ Quinn, et al., “Changing Others through Changing Ourselves,” 151, drawing on E. H. Schein, “Kurt Lewin’s Change Theory in the Field and in the Classroom: Notes toward a Model of Managed Learning,” *Systematic Practice*, 9 (1996): 27-47.

an apt description of the courage sometimes required in a competitive corporate setting, it even more appropriately describes the vocation of leaders in the persecuted church. Quinn clarifies that,

The willingness to pursue principle in a transactional world usually brings punishment and pain, but the willingness to persist is a form of purification that increases moral power and attracts others to the path of higher purpose. The transformational change agent does not pursue rewards or punishments but rather pursues a given contribution for its own sake...The motivation is not self-interest but love. People with such a motive tend to attract and elevate others.³⁶

Unlike other strategies of transformation, Advanced Change Theory challenges leaders to shift from a normalized state of being to one that is transformational, a concept which Quinn develops further in his theory of the *Fundamental State of Leadership*. The focus and goal of this personal transformation is not the leader but the vision to which he or she is devoted. In fact, Quinn argues that centralized leadership becomes unnecessary when a critical mass of people internalizes a shared vision. In such conditions, the system will self-organize.³⁷

Quinn stresses that ACT is a theory of action rather than science, “a rough set of instructions for how a person might pursue transformation” rather than testable and reproducible propositions. Whereas science requires linear logic, clear categories and statements of causes and effect, ACT emphasizes potential, “enacting and co-creating the future and delivering it into the present.”³⁸ In other words, it is faith-based. Quinn anticipates and responds to possible criticisms of ACT, including that:

1. It is not conceptually different from other change strategies, such as rational persuasion, coercion and participation. Accepting that ACT overlaps and includes other strategies, Quinn notes that emphasis on self-change seldom appears in organizational literature.
2. It is not relevant for those seeking to change straightforward processes in modern organizational life. In response, Quinn argues that many changes are more complex than apparent on the surface, that adaptive work is often met with denial and that any member of an organization, regardless of positional authority, can model moral power and become the leader of a transformational social movement.
3. It is a formula for failure because under the veneer of civility in most organizations lurks a treacherous Machiavellian world in which the weak always lose. This criticism assumes that ideas of principle are useful for rhetorical posturing, but coercive leverage is what really matters. Quinn insists that practitioners of ACT are neither weak nor naïve, but embrace a strategy of transformation surpassing the logic of transaction.
4. The exemplars of ACT identified by Quinn had personal flaws and/or the long-term consequences of their efforts have not always been commendable.³⁹ Quinn responds that ACT

³⁶ Quinn, *Change the World*, 19, 179, 242.

³⁷ Quinn, *Change the World*, 24, 184.

³⁸ Quinn, *Change the World*, 248-249.

³⁹ Quinn suggests, for example, that the legacy of Jesus might be criticised because of crimes committed in his name, not for any personal imperfections.

does not require human perfection but for the change agent to search continually for patterns of self-deception and hypocrisy, resulting in a temporary transformational state of being. The results flowing from a personal change process are not controllable or predictable. In addition, all social change is objectionable from some vantage point.

5. Gandhi, Jesus and King were heroes, and so it not appropriate for ordinary people to assume the responsibilities and risks of ACT. Quinn reframes the issue as a decision between making deep change and accepting slow death. Either choice involves significant risk, an unavoidable part of the human condition.
6. ACT can work only under the most positive conditions in which change targets are open to change, strongly identify with both the organization and the change agent, and are attracted to a vision of working for the collective good. It could also be argued that it is easier to bring radical change to an organization that has a culture of respect for its employees. Quinn counters that ACT works in the most impossible situations.

Quinn observes that these criticisms share the logic of transaction embedded in the experience of most people most of the time; as organizational members enact transactional beliefs, they co-create a transactional world and confirm transactional assumptions. By altering his or her state of being, however, a practitioner of ACT enters a transformational reality in which another paradigm of logic emerges, empowering the change agent and others in the relational system.⁴⁰

In their introduction to ACT, Quinn, Spreitzer, and Brown describe it as a speculative rather than definitive theory, designed to provoke thinking about change processes in human systems.⁴¹ In response, R. Scott Pochron highlights corroborating support for the theory among respected thought leaders in the field of leadership. He cites Jim Collins' category of Level 5 leadership, in which a non-charismatic leader functions out of a significant sense of purpose to serve the common good above personal gain, as well as Kouzes and Posner's observation that the credibility of a leader is built upon his or her character through defining and living out personal values, and striving for a higher purpose while appreciating the role of others in co-shaping the future. Pochron also points to literature on complexity theory that emphasizes the role of leadership in creating an environment for emergent realities to unfold.⁴²

4. The Fundamental State of Leadership

In the third book of his "Deep Change" trilogy, *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It*, and in a frequently cited 2005 *Harvard Business Review* article, "Moments of Greatness," Quinn introduces the

⁴⁰ Quinn, *Change the World*, 251-256.

⁴¹ Quinn, et al., "Changing Others through Changing Ourselves," 148, 160.

⁴² R. Scott Pochron, "Advanced Change Theory Revisited: An Article Critique," *Integral Review*, 4, no. 2 (December 2008): 125-132. Despite the article title, Pochron finds little to critique and much to commend in ACT.

concept of the “Fundamental State of Leadership,” a significant expansion of Advanced Change Theory. He observes that nearly all corporate training programs and books on leadership assume that effective leaders are formed by studying and emulating the behaviour of others who have been successful.⁴³ Most studies of transformational leadership focus on people in positions of formal authority and look for personal traits and behaviours that enhance organizational performance. In a chapter in *Handbook of Transformative Cooperation*, however, Quinn and Arran Caza note a relatively poor correlation between leadership position, traits or behaviour and organizational success. Rather than a product of position, behaviour or personality, they argue that leadership is best understood as a state, “a way of being in the world.”⁴⁴

Leaders do their best work, Quinn insists, when they do not copy anyone, but draw on their own core values and capabilities, “operating in a frame of mind that is true to them yet, paradoxically, not their normal state of being.” This Fundamental State of Leadership is how one leads when one faces a crisis and chooses to move forward. The qualities of this state are generative, attractive, and at the heart of positive human influence. Those who enter it increase the likelihood of attracting others to “an elevated level of community,” a high-performance state that may continue even when the leader is no longer present.⁴⁵

Quinn suggests that the tendency toward entropy in organizations is a consequence of normal human functioning. Because people habitually pursue survival of self as their highest priority, they unconsciously collude in the diminishment of themselves and their organization as a whole, collectively choosing slow death over deep change. Quinn identifies four characteristics of the normal state:

- a. **Comfort-centred**, one engages in problem-solving activities in a state of reactivity toward circumstances;
- b. **Externally directed**, people define themselves by how they think they are seen by others and how well they are able to obtain external resources;
- c. **Self-focused**, one puts one’s own interests ahead of the collective good; and
- d. **Internally closed**, one remains in one’s comfort zone, denying external signals for change.⁴⁶

⁴³ Robert E. Quinn, *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It: A Guide for Leading Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004); Robert E. Quinn, “Moments of Greatness: Entering the Fundamental State of Leadership,” *Harvard Business Review*, 83, no. 7/8 (July-August 2005): 74-83.

⁴⁴ Arran Caza and Robert E. Quinn, “The Essence of Transformation: Entering the Fundamental State of Leadership,” in *Handbook of Transformative Cooperation*, ed. Sandy Kristin Piderit, Ronald E. Fry, and David L. Cooperrider (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 170-191, ground the theory of the Fundamental State of Leadership in existing literature.

⁴⁵ Quinn, “Moments of Greatness,” 74.

⁴⁶ Robert E. Quinn, *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It*, 19-21, 81.

The impulse toward self-preservation leads to a normal fear of change and increasing gaps in personal integrity. For example, one may publicly espouse a desire to create new results while one's true priority is to stay comfortable. Functioning in this normal state serves to preserve personal ego and organizational equilibrium – leading to the subtle decline of slow death marked by “periods of unthinking routine punctuated by halting reactive change.” Positive change, Quinn maintains, begins with oneself: “We can transform our organizations by transforming ourselves.”⁴⁷

In contrast to the *normal* state, the Fundamental State of Leadership is a temporary psychological condition driven by ever-increasing levels of personal and collective integrity, a “source of life” for individuals and groups. According to Quinn, this “Ever-increasing integrity is the alpha and omega of leadership ... [It is] at once the driver and the outcome of deep change. It is the antithesis of slow death, personally and collectively. It is the answer to entropy in the social world.”⁴⁸ In the Fundamental State, one becomes more:

- a. **Purpose-centred.** Leaders clarify the result they want to create. They are committed and engaged, full of energy, holding an unwavering standard while pursuing a meaningful task.
- b. **Internally directed.** Leaders continually examine their own hypocrisy and close gaps between their values and behaviour, reaching higher levels of personal security and confidence.
- c. **Other-focused.** Leaders transcend their own ego, putting the common good and others' welfare ahead of their own, increasing in authenticity and transparency, nurturing trust, and enriching the levels of connectivity in their relational networks.
- d. **Externally open.** Leaders move outside their comfort zones, experimenting, seeking honest feedback, adapting and reaching higher levels of discovery, awareness, competence and vision.⁴⁹

Derived from analysis of people facing challenges that greatly exceeded their ability, these qualities of the Fundamental State of Leadership are not stable personal traits but a description of episodic, peak performance focused on the leader's current state of being. Rather than simply increasing technical

⁴⁷ Quinn, *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It*, ix-x, 19-21; Caza and Quinn, “The Essence of Transformation,” 179.

⁴⁸ Quinn, *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It*, 91-92.

⁴⁹ Quinn, *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It*, 21-25; Robert E. Quinn, and Gretchen M. Spreitzer, “Entering the Fundamental State of Leadership: A framework for the Positive Transformation of Self and Others,” in *Inspiring Leaders*, eds. Ronald J. Burke and Cary L. Cooper (New York: Routledge, 2006): 67-83. Quinn's four domains of the Fundamental State broadly correspond with Bass and Riggio's four components of transformational leadership. Quinn's purpose-centeredness enables inspirational motivation, internal drive/integrity provides an anchor for idealized influence, other-focus leads to individualized consideration and externally openness facilitates intellectual stimulation.

competence or pursuing incremental change, shifting from normal functioning into the Fundamental State of Leadership involves a courageous journey which influences others not through coercion but moral power. In this state, Quinn says, “we overcome entropy and slow death. We become more fully alive. Furthermore, we begin to attract others to the fundamental state of leadership...we become extraordinary, and our organization changes. It becomes a system of positive organizing, a more productive community with increased energy, commitment and capability.” Quinn and Spreitzer describe the state as a condition of optimal balance in which one is more likely to challenge others to envision possibility, engage reality, build community, and move forward in learning. The traditional functions of leadership, vision, connection and inspiration, according to Caza and Quinn, follow from the Fundamental State.⁵⁰

Two reciprocal upward spirals may result from functioning in this state. The first is within the individual, who begins to experience a more unique and complex self, simultaneously becoming more differentiated and integrated. With heightened purpose – even a sense of call – one is motivated to pursue a particular result. In this state, one becomes more aligned with one’s internal values, the dynamic external environment, and more connected with others.⁵¹ In a transformational state of leadership one disrupts the status quo, becoming a positive deviant: “a source of variation, a jolt of uncertainty in the system,” “a living invitation to change,” potentially triggering a second spiral as personal influence increases and new patterns of organization emerge. Others are enticed to change as they make sense of disrupted expectations, new assumptions and perspectives. Emergent organizing, then, results not through planning and control but “a process of interpersonal contagion and interaction.” Because of this positive organizational spiral, the success of a leader’s vision does not depend on the leader’s ongoing presence. Quinn explains: “When uncertainty goes up, people create new patterns of relationship. Control systems and status structures melt away. Leadership shifts from person to person as needed. No one is leading the process in the traditional sense, yet it leads to new outcomes.”⁵²

How does one enter this creative state of leadership? In addition to the catalytic role of crisis in propelling one from normal functioning to the Fundamental State of Leadership, Quinn describes eight

⁵⁰ Quinn and Spreitzer, “Entering the Fundamental State of Leadership,” 71, 77; Quinn, *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It*, 23; Caza and Quinn, “The Essence of Transformation,” 186.

⁵¹ Robert E. Quinn, and Arran Caza, “Deep Change,” in *Encyclopedia of Leadership, Volume 1*, ed. George R. Goethals, Georgia J. Sorenson, James MacGregor Burns (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004): 325-331.

⁵² Quinn, *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It*, 82; Quinn and Caza, “Deep Change,” 330.

practices which serve as pathways to (and expressions of) this state. Each embraces a dynamic tension between seemingly paradoxical qualities and shares a common anchor in ever-increasing integrity: *reflective action, authentic engagement, appreciative inquiry, grounded vision, adaptive confidence, detached interdependence, responsible freedom and tough love*. These transformational practices challenge leaders to interpret and engage reality in atypical ways, spurring them to commit to a higher purpose and increased authenticity, becoming more oriented to the needs of others and externally open.⁵³

Caza and Quinne identify three implications of understanding leadership as a state for the study and practice of leadership:

- a. Because anyone may be a leader, leadership may emerge at unexpected times and places with potential to advance an organization;
- b. There is a crucial need to balance competing demands of creativity and control; and
- c. Because it is not possible to be perpetually in the Fundamental State, leadership must be intermittent. Management is also necessary to regularize and refine new possibilities. In this way, individuals and organizations “advance through a series of plateaus,” sometimes expanding behaviours and creating new resources, then using those resources in periods of stability. “No one can lead, in the true sense of the word, all the time, nor should they be expected to.”⁵⁴

5. Empirical support for Quinn’s transformational theory

Constance Harmsen observes that Quinn’s transformational change trilogy – *Deep Change*, *Change the World*, and *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It* – affects readers at an emotional level through personal stories, but that he makes few references to empirical research to support his findings. She does, however, identify two significant sources of evidence that undergird Quinn’s theory: 1) a multiple step study using Joseph Campbell’s concept of the hero’s journey to make sense of self-identified high performance experiences and patterns in organizational life, and 2) a study of middle managers involved in a large-scale management development program at Ford Motor Company.⁵⁵

⁵³ Quinn, *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It*, 77-194, describes the integration of these concepts in a discussion of four ways to see leadership, including: 1) the static view, which identifies desired traits of leaders in isolation from each other; 2) the polar view, which arranges traits into polar groups that are seemingly opposite but related (such as “reflective” and “active”), recognizing the value of both; 3) a competing values view, which aligns positive polarities and explains how the over-emphasis of a positive trait can lead to negative impacts; and 4), an integrated view recognizing that positive traits do not exist in isolation, but as part of a reciprocal system in which they expand, co-creating and sustaining each other.

⁵⁴ Caza and Quinn, “The Essence of Transformation,” 186-188.

⁵⁵ Constance A. Harmsen, “Transformational Change and the Experience of the Chief Executive Officer in Building a New Hospital” (Ph.D. diss., Fielding Graduate University, 2011), 41-42.

In a 1995 *Journal of Management Inquiry* article, “Excavating the paths of meaning, renewal, and empowerment,” Quinn, Gretchen Spreitzer, and Jerry Fletcher offer quantitative and qualitative analysis of high performance narratives gathered from eighty-seven participants in a two-day executive education workshop. They identify four archetypes of individual high performance: a) the journey of responsive service; b) the journey of independent task pursuit; c) the journey of intense achievement; and d) the journey of collective fulfillment. Leaders grounded in the latter two personal myths differentiate themselves from their systemic context and are more likely to exercise personal authority than those who base their functioning on the first two categories. Noting the transformational potential of those who move into journeys of intense achievement or collective fulfillment in moments of crisis and reinvention, the authors identify two points at which their findings contradict conventional management literature:

- a. Rather than a list of rules outlining an optimal path for high performance, the study suggests various paths to personal meaning inherent in exceptional performance;
- b. Whereas most measurement systems assume that high performance is exhibited by only a few people, Quinn, Spreitzer and Fletcher find that all participants have had high performance experiences at some point in their lives.⁵⁶

Another source of empirical data for the development of Quinn’s transformational leadership theory arises from the Ford–University of Michigan *Leadership, Education and Development Program* (LEAD), an extensive four year effort designed to change the mindsets of middle managers at Ford Motor Company. In groups of 50, three thousand managers voluntarily participated in a one week core session and a 2.5 day session six months later. Quinn was part of the team that created and administered the program. Working with data collected from 191 Ford middle managers at three points during the longitudinal study from 1991-1992, Quinn and Spreitzer documented the surprising transformational capacity of managers who had been socialized to engage in largely transactional management patterns. In the six months following the initial one week learning session, forty-six percent of study participants initiated significant transformational change in their work unit or more broadly in the organization. A statistical analysis of

⁵⁶ Robert E. Quinn, Gretchen M. Spreitzer, and Jerry Fletcher, “Excavating the Paths of Meaning, Renewal, and Empowerment: A Typology of Managerial High-performance Myths,” *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 4, no. 1 (March 1995): 16-39.

manager reports also identified three major barriers to change: bureaucratic culture, embedded conflict and personal time constraints.⁵⁷

One of the most noteworthy findings of the LEAD study, according to Harmsen, is that managers making transformational change at the organizational level had the lowest rates of promotion both prior to and after taking part in LEAD. Managers with high rates of promotion made more conservative changes affecting their unit but with less organizational reach. Their choices were likely seen as less threatening to their supervisors. When managers who initiated change at the organizational level were asked to interpret this finding, they spoke about how LEAD stimulated them to break out of a rut. Participation in the program and their own emerging introspection enabled them to choose “to ‘do the right thing’ rather than the ‘political thing’ or the ‘easy thing’ as in the past.”⁵⁸

In addition to the above studies, Harmsen suggests empirical support for Quinn’s transformational change theory can be found in the work of punctuated equilibrium theorists, particularly in connection to revolutionary change. She notes that like Connie Gersick and Thomas Kuhn, Quinn sees the change cycle sparked through a failure or crisis that makes one willing to risk everything to achieve deep, dramatic transformation. The initiation and uncertainty phases of Quinn’s transformational cycle correspond with observations by Ilya Prigogine, Isabelle Stengers, Elaine Romanelli and Michael L. Tushman that in a revolutionary period group members hold various perceptions of reality and do not know if a shared vision will be successful; optimism keeps people active and invested in the work of change. According to Harmsen, the need for experimentation in the uncertainty phase finds support in Gersick’s moments of insight and cognition for groups, through which new structures are crystallized. The emergence of vision and routinization of transformation can be grounded in empirical work by Gersick, Kuhn, Prigogine, Stengers, Tushman, Romanelli, Stephen Gould and Daniel Levinson.⁵⁹

Harmsen characterizes Quinn’s theory of transformational change as a middle-range theory offering an explanation of a specific social phenomenon without attempting to construct a complete theoretical system. She thus validates Quinn’s own description of the Fundamental State of Leadership as

⁵⁷ Gretchen M. Spreitzer and Robert E. Quinn, “Empowering Middle Managers to be Transformational Leaders,” *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 32, no. 3 (September 1996): 237-261; Quinn, *Deep Change*, 133-144.

⁵⁸ Spreitzer and Quinn, “Empowering Middle Managers,” 254-256; Harmsen, “Transformational Change,” 46.

⁵⁹ Harmsen, “Transformational Change,” 47-48.

“radical, inductive and applied” – *radical* because it is based on *who* a person is rather than position or competencies, *inductive* because it is derived from field observations of people who are transformative and *applied* because of its focus on practice.⁶⁰

Concluding that Quinn’s transformational theory is logically adequate, useful, parsimonious and testable, Harmsen recognizes the need for it to be tested by further quantitative and qualitative research, and conceives her own research as one such study. With Quinn’s transformational change cycle as a framework, Harmsen undertook a qualitative study of twelve hospital chief executive officers involved in substantial building projects. Primarily based on a content analysis of face-to-face interviews, Harmsen finds the experiences of study participants consistent with Quinn’s transformational change cycle.⁶¹

William Breisch and Martin Lexmond offer support for Quinn’s concept of the Fundamental State of Leadership through their phenomenological study investigating how personal growth due to trauma affects leadership. Quinn’s theory is a central conceptual lens for their research – together with Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas’ work on crucible experiences, and Nancy Stanford-Blair and Michael Dickmann’s leadership formation research. Using Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun’s Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) to identify nine participants who had grown as a result of trauma, the researchers collected data through qualitative interviews in three stages. Breisch and Lexmond find that leaders in their study had grown in their 1) adaptive capacity, “learning to learn” (external openness); 2) engagement with others (other-focused); and 3) purpose-centeredness following their experience with trauma. These areas correspond to three of the four quadrants of Quinn’s Fundamental State of Leadership. There is no evidence, however, for growth in the domain of integrity/internal motivation in participant comments.⁶²

6. *Lift*: Empirical anchors and practical application of the Fundamental State of Leadership

In a fourth book, *Lift: Becoming a Positive Force in any Situation*, Quinn teams up with his son Ryan Quinn to describe the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of the Fundamental State of Leadership more explicitly and equip readers to apply it in every sphere of life. To reach a broader audience, the authors rename the state “Lift,” using the word to refer both to influence (an uplifting effect one can have

⁶⁰ Harmsen, “Transformational Change”; Quinn, *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It*, x.

⁶¹ Harmsen, “Transformational Change,” 48-53, 234-242.

⁶² William F. Breisch, and Martin G. Lexmond, “An Examination of the Phenomenon of Growth after Trauma and its Influence on Leadership” (Ed.D. diss., Cardinal Stritch University, 2013).

on others) as well as a psychological state (a temporary pattern of thoughts and feeling). Drawing on literature from positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship, Quinn and Quinn explore the connection between influence and psychological states. They cite research that confirms surprising ways in which change in one person's psychological state influences others:

- a. Facial expressions, body language and tone of voice send new and unexpected cues that people interpret and react to in new and different ways;
- b. Emotions are contagious; people often mimic and then adopt others' feelings;
- c. A person's decisions and actions – which influence others – may vary depending on one's psychological state;
- d. Different actions performed in different ways generate different results which may be more effective, creative, of higher quality and beneficial than what is expected; others pay attention and try to make sense of unusual or extraordinary results.

Using the categories of the Fundamental State, Quinn and Quinn define influence as positive when it 1) invites people toward purposes that 2) meet the needs of those involved 3) in ways that increasingly reflect their highest personal and social values and 4) adapt to changing circumstances over time.⁶³

One of Robert Quinn's most significant contributions to the field of leadership has been the Competing-Values Framework (CVF) for Organizational Effectiveness, co-developed with John Rohrbaugh in 1983. Based on an extensive review of research literature, Quinn and Rohrbaugh mapped organizational effectiveness on two dimensions: organizational focus (internal versus external) and organizational structure (stable versus flexible). The two dimensions of CVF classify models of organizational effectiveness and culture in four quadrants: human relations (clan culture), open system (adhocracy), rational goal (market) and internal process (hierarchy) models. Highlighting the need to understand paradoxical tensions in organizational effectiveness, CVF has received strong empirical validation in cross-cultural research, and is widely accepted in the field.⁶⁴

⁶³ Ryan W. Quinn, and Robert E. Quinn, *Lift: Becoming a Positive Force in any Situation* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2009), 2-11. The authors cite significant empirical research for each of the four domains of the Fundamental State of Leadership throughout the book.

⁶⁴ Tianyuan Yu, and Nengquan Wu, "A Review of Study on the Competing Values Framework," *International Journal of Business and Management*, 4, no. 7 (July 2009): 37-42; Kim Cameron, "Organizational Effectiveness: Its Demise and Re-emergence through Positive Organizational Scholarship," in *Great Minds in Management: The Process of Theory Development*, ed. Michael A. Hitt and Ken G. Smith, 304-330 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). For an exploration of leadership competencies, strategies and organizational levers of change relevant for each quadrant of the CVF, see Kim S. Cameron, Robert E. Quinn, Jeff DeGraff, and Anjan V. Thakor, *Competing Values Leadership: Creating Value in Organizations* Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2006. For application to organizational culture, see Kim S. Cameron and Robert E. Quinn, *Diagnosing and Changing Organizational Culture: Based on the Competing Values Framework*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011).

In *Lift*, Quinn and Quinn show how the four components of the Fundamental State of Leadership correspond with the Competing-Values Framework for Organizational Effectiveness. Other-focus supports the collaboration essential in the domain of human relations. External openness enables the function of an open system by stimulating learning and creativity. Purpose-centeredness maps well onto the rational goals quadrant, fostering achievement and competitiveness. Internal direction gives one the self-control necessary to live with integrity to one's values. Quinn and Quinn compare the four domains of the Fundamental State with the systems necessary for an airplane to achieve lift. Each dimension is important for effective leadership and organizations, and needs to work together with the others.⁶⁵

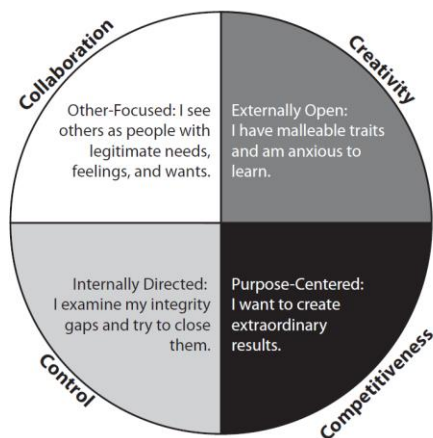


Figure 1. A Competing-Values Framework for Psychological States. Quinn and Quinn, *Lift*, 36.

One needs to experience “Lift” in order to lift others. Quinn and Quinn observe, however, that pressures of daily living often drag people from Lift into more normal states in which they seek comfort, react automatically to the world around them, focus on their own needs and feelings and believe that there is little they can do to improve their performance. To facilitate moving into the Fundamental State of Leadership apart from crisis, the authors offer four transformative questions. As a methodology, the questions are more tightly focussed – and probably more easily applied amid the complexity of leadership decisions – than the eight paradoxical practices offered in *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It*. Each question corresponds to a quadrant of the Fundamental State. To become centered on purpose, Quinn and Quinn recommend asking: “*What result do I want to create?*” For internal direction: “*What would my story be if I were living the values I expect of others?*” To focus on others: “*How do others feel about the*

⁶⁵ Quinn and Quinn, *Lift*, 27-38.

situation?” For external openness: “What are three (or four or five) strategies I could use to accomplish my purpose for this situation?”⁶⁶

With these questions, leaders in a “normal” comfort-centred, internally closed, self-focused, externally directed state may spur themselves toward the Fundamental State of Leadership. Still, most leaders in contexts of freedom have the luxury of remaining in a normal, uninspired, mostly ineffective state if they so choose! Persecution, however, thrusts potential leaders into situations they did not choose and cannot control. In response, men and women regularly need to decide whether to lead with courage or not lead at all. How might the concept of *Lift* shed light on the dynamics of leadership in such conditions?

Is it possible to function as a comfort-centred leader in a time of persecution? Not likely! One seeking personal comfort would normally disengage from the arena of leadership to reduce his or her vulnerability to suffering. How do leaders retain their integrity amid the myriad external pressures related to persecution: from persecutors who want them to forsake their identity and mission, family members who may crave security and church members looking for faithful leadership? How does one maintain love for others – even for persecutors – rather than slip into self-focus? Quinn and Quinn observe that experiencing empathy from others can help people be more resilient and act with more integrity because it helps them feel secure.⁶⁷ How do leaders in the persecuted community model care for others? In a context that requires adaptive creativity, do leaders easily recognize the need for an open posture of learning or does persecution increase the temptation to isolate oneself from potentially painful realities, feedback or new information?

7. Additional analysis

Although developed in an entrepreneurial context, the Fundamental State of Leadership holds great promise as a framework for understanding effective leadership under crisis, including the realities of church leadership in settings of persecution. There are, however, additional critiques of Quinn’s theory, positive organizational scholarship and transformational leadership which need to be addressed.

⁶⁶ The four questions are introduced in Quinn, “Moments of greatness,” 74-83, described further and placed in the context of academic literature by Quinn and Spreitzer, “Entering the Fundamental State of Leadership,” 67-83, and explained most fully in Quinn and Quinn, *Lift*, 17-21.

⁶⁷ Quinn and Quinn, *Lift*, 155-156.

a. Theoretical critique: Too leader-focused

Based on his reading of the 2005 article, “Moments of Greatness,” Anthony Putman argues that Quinn’s theory of the Fundamental State is too leader-focused. While affirming Quinn’s assertion that effective leadership is not lodged in particular leadership traits, Putman disputes the notion that a specific *state* – “fundamental or not” – is key to leading well. Because leadership requires a context of mutual endeavour, it entails engagement in complex web of relationship and circumstance. By centering the locus of effectiveness in the person of the leader, Quinn oversimplifies and distorts the nature of leadership, according to Putman:⁶⁸

If I could send a single message to someone who wanted to improve their success at leading, it would be this: Essentially, fundamentally, *leading is NOT about you...Leading is about us...* To lead is to pay attention fundamentally to that community of interests, to the mutual endeavor and each person’s contribution to it. To lead is to make the contributions, and therefore the value creation, possible.⁶⁹

Putman is right, of course, to warn against reducing leadership to a psychological state. His objection, however, misreads the function of the Fundamental State of Leadership for Quinn, who does not subsume the whole domain of leadership under this term, but merely the psychological orientation of one positioned to lead effectively. Awareness of the broader, complex reality of leadership is embedded in Quinn’s definition of the Fundamental State. To be fully engaged in the pursuit of a worthwhile purpose, to put others ahead of self, and to be externally open to the complexities of context within and beyond the organization necessarily requires an understanding that leadership is not primarily about the leader. Although Quinn’s theory gives substantial attention to the person of the leader, it is grounded in robust understandings of complexity, affirms the leadership potential of every individual in an organization, and – rather than nurturing self-preoccupation – challenges people to greater purpose, collaboration, and learning.

b. Positive Organizational Scholarship

Much of Quinn’s work in the field of organizational change – including his theory of the Fundamental State – falls within the emerging discipline of *Positive Organizational Scholarship* (POS).

⁶⁸ Anthony O. Putman, “Leading: Perspectives for Leaders and Leadership Coaches” (The Putman Group, 2013), accessed November 9, 2016, <http://tonyputman.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/ADP-10-Leading-reprint.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Peter Henne, *Trends in Global Restrictions on Religion* (Washington: Pew Research Center, June 23, 2016), <http://www.pewforum.org/2016/06/23/trends-in-global-restrictions-on-religion>.

⁶⁹ Putman, “Leading,” 5-6. Putman’s critique would apply to the transformational leadership paradigm more broadly; see, for example, Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 6th ed., 202-204.

Quinn and his University of Michigan colleagues Kim Cameron and Jane Dutton recognized a bias in organizational studies toward transactional assumptions with accompanying emphases on problem solving, reciprocity and justice, managing uncertainty, overcoming resistance, achieving profitability and competing successfully against others. Without denying transactional reality, in 2001 Quinn, Cameron and Dutton envisioned POS as a new field of study focused on dynamics of excellence, thriving, abundance, resilience and virtue, founding the *Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship*⁷⁰ at University of Michigan's Ross School of Business the following year. In 2003, they published *Positive Organizational Scholarship: Foundations of a New Discipline*, with contributions from more than thirty other scholars with expertise in leadership studies, positive psychology, appreciative inquiry and organizational research.⁷¹

With roots in positive psychology, community psychology, positive and pro-social organizational behavior, organizational development, and corporate social performance, POS has 1) an affirmative bias toward exceptional, virtuous, life-giving and flourishing phenomena, 2) an emphasis on organized rather than purely individual contexts, and 3) a foundation in theoretical explanation and empirical support.⁷²

Stephen Fineman suggests that this emphasis on positivity in organizational studies 1) is grounded in inappropriate assumptions about the essential goodness of humanity; 2) threatens to sideline negative emotions, such as fear, anxiety, sadness and hatred, which in reality often have an intimate dialectical connection with positive virtues and outcomes; 3) reflects an American cultural bias; and 4) may cloud the need to address dysfunctional, oppressive systems and stigmatize "negative thinkers." Questioning the need for POS to exist as a distinct discipline, Fineman argues that to make a genuinely helpful contribution to scholarship, POS needs to incorporate critical theory which attends to the social, political and power processes that shape the identities and freedom of organizational members.⁷³

⁷⁰ This POS research hub is currently named the *Center for Positive Organizations*.

⁷¹ Kim S. Cameron, Jane E. Dutton, and Robert E. Quinn, eds, *Positive Organizational Scholarship: Foundations of a New Discipline* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003), 3-4; Thomas A. Wright and James Campbell Quick, "The Emerging Positive Agenda in Organizations: Greater than a Trickle, but not yet a Deluge," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 30, no. 2 (2009): 147-159, give historical perspective to the neglect of positive themes in organizational research.

⁷² Arran Caza and Kim Cameron, "Positive Organizational Scholarship: What Does it Achieve?" in *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Behavior, Volume 2: Macro Approaches*, ed. Stewart R. Clegg and Cary L. Cooper (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009): 99-116; Kim Cameron, "Organizational Effectiveness," 304-330 argues that POS has revived interest in the languishing field of organizational studies.

⁷³ Stephen Fineman, "On Being Positive: Concerns and Counterpoints," *The Academy of Management Review*, 31, no. 2 (April 2006): 270-291; Arran Caza and Brigid Carroll, "Critical Theory and Positive Organizational Scholarship," in *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship*, ed. Kim S. Cameron and Gretchen M. Spreitzer, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 965-978, validate the importance of critical theory for POS; Caza

In response to Fineman, Laura Roberts acknowledges that positive psychology and organizational scholarship have potential to 1) create misperceptions by ignoring problems, inequities and deficits, 2) be used to inappropriately prescribe behaviours that generate profit by exploiting employees' good will, and 3) create unrealistic expectations for excellence and perfectionism that can undermine performance and well-being over time. Still, Roberts insists that the intent of positive scholarship – to discover the mechanisms that enable human flourishing – is a worthy and necessary goal. She suggests that it will be difficult to create a multi-faceted picture of organizational life if scholars only study positive end states while ignoring dynamics that build capability. She observes that seemingly negative experiences may set generative dynamics in motion; for example, restoration resulting from loss, healing from illness, and resilience from failure. Difficulty may thus propel individuals and organizations toward excellence (including churches thriving under persecution, one might add). Suggesting that many concerns regarding positive scholarship stem from its relative infancy as a discipline, Roberts affirms the need for POS to remain grounded in the broader field of organizational scholarship, particularly critical theory, in order to take the positive as seriously as the negative.⁷⁴

Robert Quinn and Ned Wellman argue that POS complements traditional research by illuminating new, more positive patterns of organizing. Acknowledging that traditional (or “normal”) approaches to organizational research have contributed significantly to what is known about change, Quinn and Wellman assert that this research promotes a restrictive set of assumptions about organizational behaviour, depicting:

- 1) Individuals who make utilitarian assumptions, comply with demands, endure constraints, minimize personal costs, prefer the status quo, and to fail to grasp all the opportunities in the work setting; and

and Kim Cameron, “Positive Organizational Scholarship: What Does it Achieve?” 99-116 acknowledge the Western cultural roots of POS and recommend research into dynamics of positive organizing in other cultures to enhance the empirical foundations of the discipline.

⁷⁴ Laura Morgan Roberts, “Response: Shifting the Lens on Organizational Life: The Added Value of Positive Scholarship,” *The Academy of Management Review*, 31, no. 2 (April 2006): 292-305; Wright and Quick, “The Emerging Positive Agenda in Organizations,” 147-159, argue that the quest to better understand positive issues has a long history in the organizational sciences, though largely muted for decades; J. Richard Hackman, “The Perils of Positivity,” *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 30, no. 2 (2009): 309-319 critiques a related branch of organizational positivity scholarship – Positive Organizational Behaviour (POB) – for its focus on individual-level phenomena, the ahistorical character of POB research and writing, lack of conceptual clarity, and over-reliance on a particular research strategy (self-report tests and surveys). While Hackman uses the terms POS and POB interchangeably, Fred Luthans and Bruce Avolio, “The Point of Positive Organizational Behavior,” *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 30, no. 2 (2009): 291–307, distinguish between them, observing that the POB movement (centred at the University of Nebraska) tends to focus on individual and interpersonal levels of functioning, while POS (centred at the University of Michigan) engages in more organizational analysis. Still, Luthans and Avolio acknowledge significant overlap between the fields of POB and POS. Wright and Quick accept the distinctions between POS and POB but treat them together under the umbrella of positive organizational research.

- 2) Organizations that struggle to react to constraints imposed by their external environments and compete with each other for limited resources.⁷⁵

While recognizing the validity of these assumptions in many cases, Quinn and Wellman insist that they paint an incomplete picture. They observe that the relatively small but growing body of POS research uncovers less observed transformational experience for individuals and organizations. Comparing differences between traditional and positive perspectives in organizational change literature, Quinn and Wellman note that at the individual level:

1. The target of change is normally *others*; in POS it is *self*;
2. Orientation to purpose is normally centred on *comfort*; in POS it is on *results*;
3. Expectations are normally *externally directed*; in POS they are *internally directed*;
4. Relationships are normally *self-focused*; in POS they are *focused on others*;
5. Change agents normally have an *internally closed* stance toward learning; POS notes the effectiveness of *external openness*.

At the organizational level, Quinn and Wellman identify that:

1. Individual agency is normally seen as *bounded*; POS studies of change, however, see *limitless* possibilities for individuals to initiate positive change;
2. Traditional studies of organizational change focus on the need to *preserve the organization* by maintaining or restoring equilibrium; POS gives attention to adaptive change and the need to *facilitate positive organizing*;
3. There is normally high value place on *expertise* based on incremental and linear change; POS gives attention to the importance of continual organizational *learning*;
4. Communication is normally focused on an *analysis of current reality*; POS highlight the power of *symbolic descriptions of the future*;
5. Traditional perspectives on change focus on *finding problems*; POS focuses on *finding possibilities*;
6. Researchers normally observe organizations characterized by *low positivity ratios* in which members experience a relatively high incidence of negative feelings; organizations studied by POS scholars tend to have *high positivity ratios*.⁷⁶

Why are traditional and POS perspectives on change so different from each other when they presumably describe the same organizational reality? Quinn and Wellman account for it based on research

⁷⁵ Robert E. Quinn and Ned Wellman, "Seeing and Acting Differently: Positive Change in Organizations," in *The Oxford Handbook of Positive Organizational Scholarship*, ed. Kim S. Cameron and Gretchen M. Spreitzer, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 751-762.

⁷⁶ Quinn and Wellman, "Seeing and Acting Differently, 752-758.

selection criteria. If organizational effectiveness can be described by a curve, they argue the performance of the majority of organizations would fall at or around the mean. A few exceptional organizations exhibiting unusually poor or unusually good performance would fall at the ends of the curve. Whereas research normally seeks to accurately portray reality in the majority of cases, POS explores how organizations function at their best, seeking out positive deviants at the far right of the performance curve. Quinn and Wellman argue, then, that both traditional and positive organizational scholarship offer accurate and complementary depictions of reality.⁷⁷

Positive Organizational Scholarship does not seek to supplant traditional research as a field of study, but offers focus for diverse scholarly work examining positive phenomena in various contexts and disciplines. Cameron and Caza thus describe POS as “a catalyst, an organizing mechanism, and a sense-making device to classify and clarify important positive phenomena in organizational settings.”⁷⁸

c. Cross-cultural relevance of transformational leadership theory

A final question remains. Given the American academic and organizational roots of Quinn’s leadership theory – and a lack of research into its application in non-Western cultural contexts – is it an appropriate conceptual lens for research with Ethiopian church leaders? Considering the absence of literature exploring the cross-cultural relevance of Quinn’s work, one must look more broadly to the global applicability of transformational leadership theory.

Is transformational leadership a cross-cultural phenomenon? Peter Blunt and Merrick Jones argue that the international export of Western leadership theory amounts to naïve cultural imperialism. The underlying values of the transformational leadership paradigm, they suggest, give considerable importance to 1) relative equality of power and status between leaders and followers; 2) high tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty among all concerned; 3) high levels of trust; 4) a desire to share feelings and emotions; 5) a willingness to embrace interpersonal conflict, difference of opinion, and risk-taking; and 6) strong beliefs in the virtues of teamwork. Using Geert Hofstede’s terms of cultural analysis, Blunt and Jones contend that transformational leadership theory assumes *low power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, low individuality, and medium masculinity* – a cultural profile unlike any of the developing countries studied by

⁷⁷ Quinn and Wellman, “Seeing and Acting Differently, 758-759.

⁷⁸ Kim S. Cameron and Arran Caza, “Contributions to the Discipline of Positive Organizational Scholarship,” *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47, no. 6 (February 2004): 731-739.

Hofstede or even of the United States, the dominant incubator of the theory. Blunt and Jones see this as evidence of the fundamentally prescriptive nature of Western leadership theory.⁷⁹

Turning their attention to Africa, Blunt and Jones note the diversity of cultures on the continent and the perils of making general characterizations about them. Still, they posit that African societies tend to value interpersonal relations above individual achievements, and be egalitarian within age groups, but hierarchical or gerontocratic between them. Leaders are expected to behave paternalistically, bestow favour, and receive deference. Because consensus is highly valued, decision making within levels can be time-consuming, but achieved relatively quickly between hierarchical ranks. Blunt and Jones find that interpersonal issues predominate; African managers, for example, are inclined to be more concerned about the quality of their relationship with their supervisor than personal or organizational effectiveness. Without romanticizing indigenous leadership patterns, they strongly caution against imposing Western leadership values and strategies on non-Western leaders.⁸⁰

Bass and Riggio, however, cite research indicating that both transactional and transformational leadership can be found in all parts of the world and in all types of organizations. Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) findings confirm that elements of charismatic-transformational leadership are valued leader qualities in all countries and cultures.⁸¹ Recognizing that most leadership research during the previous half-century was conducted in the United States, Canada and Western Europe, Robert J. House founded the GLOBE research project in 1993, gathering an international group of social scientists and management scholars for a long-term study of leadership in sixty-two cultures. In 2004, House et al noted that almost all prevailing theories of leadership and most empirical evidence is North American in character: individualistic rather than collectivistic, reflecting American assumptions of rationality rather than ascetics or religion, stated in terms of individual rather than group incentives, stressing follower responsibilities rather than rights, hedonistic rather than altruistic motivation, the centrality of work and democratic values.⁸²

⁷⁹ Peter Blunt, and Merrick L. Jones, "Exploring the Limits of Western leadership Theory in East Asia and Africa," *Personnel Review*, 26, no. 1/2 (1997): 6-23.

⁸⁰ Blunt and Jones, "Exploring the Limits of Western Leadership Theory," 6-23.

⁸¹ Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 2nd ed., 16.

⁸² Robert J. House et al., eds., *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), 56; Alan Bryman, "Qualitative Research on leadership: A Critical but Appreciative

To what extent are beliefs about effective leadership shared across cultures? Of 112 leadership attributes included in the study, GLOBE found 22 that met criteria for universal desirability. When individual attributes were subsequently grouped into 21 primary leadership dimensions, researchers determined that four of these – *performance orientation*, *integrity*, *visionary* and *inspirational* behaviour – are valued all cultures studied. In each society leaders are expected to develop a vision, inspire others and create a successful performance-oriented team within their organization while behaving with honesty and integrity.⁸³ These qualities – together with the dimensions “self-sacrificial” and “decisive” – are key components in what GLOBE researchers describe as Charismatic/Value-Based Leadership.

Although some theorists use the terms “charismatic” and “transformational” leadership interchangeably, House et al. maintain that in *charismatic* theories, followers look for guidance and inspiration from leaders whom they perceive to be extraordinary; in *transformational* theories, extraordinary performance can result when followers are inspired and developed without full personal identification and attachment to the leader. Still, House et al. note that inspiration and vision are common to both sets of theories. In addition, leaders with high scores on transformational leadership measures also exhibit high charisma in most studies.⁸⁴ It is significant too, that “integrity” is important both for charismatic theory and for qualifying transformational leadership as “authentic.”

While confirming the universal preference for most transformational qualities and leadership actions, House et al. discover that leadership enactment varies across cultures. Transformational behaviour is culturally embedded and expressed; leaders tend to enact the kind of leadership expected in a culture. Still, GLOBE finds that Chief Executive Officers who create superior results practice charismatic/transformational behaviours – particularly in the visionary, inspirational, integrity and performance-oriented dimensions – that exceed leadership expectations in each society.⁸⁵

While not discounting the substantial evidence Hofstede and House et al. have marshalled toward understanding cross-cultural leadership, Richard Bolden and Philip Kirk suggest that their largely psychological approach based on quantification of cultural values underestimates individual and contextual

Review,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 15:6 (December 2004): 729–769, confirms the North American dominance of leadership research in his review of research literature published by 2004.

⁸³ Robert J. House et al., eds., *Strategic Leadership across Cultures: The GLOBE Study of CEO Leadership Behavior and Effectiveness in 24 Countries* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 23.

⁸⁴ House et al., *Strategic Leadership across Cultures*, 56-59.

⁸⁵ House et al., *Strategic Leadership across Cultures*, 61-65, 95-100, 336-338.

differences and imposes western frameworks of analysis on African leadership. Instead of breaking down culture into discrete dimensions or trying to implement universalistic models of leadership, Bolden and Kirk call for a constructionist uncovering of Afro-centric knowledge about leadership, encouraging further study of indigenous concepts such as “Ubuntu,” which reframes the Western dichotomy between “individual” and “collective” as “self in community.” They are confident that as African researchers work with African paradigms, they will create theories and approaches not only relevant in African contexts, but will make positive contributions to global leadership theory.⁸⁶

Stella Nkomo more radically critiques representations of African leadership discourse in organizational studies from a postcolonial, anti-colonial perspective. In her review of relevant literature, Nkomo finds leadership and management on the continent predominantly portrayed as deficient, a characterization she believes is rooted in essentialist racial and colonial stereotypes of Africa. Counter narratives offered in response to these portrayals tend to evoke a unique “African” identity, also based on essentialist assumptions. Rather than disrupting the dominant discourse, Nkomo argues that this quest to recover the grandeur of pre-colonial Africa ends up reinforcing and exaggerating a sense of African otherness, often reflecting excesses of cultural relativism.⁸⁷

Nkomo observes that leadership theory primarily originates from the United States, built on studies of American leaders, but is largely represented as universal. Scholars do not often acknowledge that this supposed “universal” is actually specific; knowledge resulting from the study of one group is typically represented as comprehensive and normative. The prefix “American,” then, is suppressed when describing leadership theory emerging in the United States. In contrast, non-Western “others” who speak or write about leadership must always attach a prefix like “African” to identify contextual limits.⁸⁸

Even leadership literature that intends to increase awareness of the particularity and uniqueness of culture tends to make sweeping generalizations about the African context, with the culture of one or a few countries taken to represent the whole. In Hofstede’s work, for example, “West Africa” is listed as one of

⁸⁶ Richard Bolden, and Philip Kirk, “African Leadership: Surfacing New Understandings through Leadership Development,” *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 9, no. 1 (2009): 69–86; Yene H. K. Assegid, “African Leadership: Perspectives of 20 Senior African Leaders and Heads of States” (Ph.D diss., California Institute of Integral Studies, 2010), 64-67, surveys literature on *Ubuntu* and summarizes it a set of traditional African leadership values based on inclusion, characterized by consultation, persuasion, accommodation and cohabitation – a “humaneness” expressed communally.

⁸⁷ Stella Nkomo, “A Postcolonial and Anti-colonial Reading of ‘African’ Leadership and Management in Organization Studies: Tensions, Contradictions and Possibilities,” *Organization* 18, no. 3 (May 2011): 365-386.

⁸⁸ Nkomo, “‘African’ Leadership and Management,” 371.

ten “countries” with France, Indonesia and seven other nation states. The GLOBE study broadly treats the culture of “sub-Saharan Africa” – a region of 53 countries – when only five of them were included in the research. Not only Western texts, but also those attempting to create alternate “African” leadership theory often portray African culture as homogeneous, highlighting certain beliefs and values presumably shared by all Africans based on limited research in a handful of countries. The concept of *Ubuntu*, for example, is peculiar to South Africa but is often prescribed as relevant for the whole continent.⁸⁹

Nkomo observes that transformative change is indeed a common topic of conversation across Africa as leaders grapple with persistent challenges associated with unequal development and marginalization. Recognizing the vast cultural diversity on the continent, Nkomo counsels against searching for a prescriptive “African” leadership theory. Instead, she encourages descriptive research into how African organizational leaders are responding to the dual pressures of globalization and local needs. In addition, she calls scholars to exercise epistemic awareness and reflexivity, acknowledging their own cultural identity and position as they engage in their work.⁹⁰

C. Summary

Despite growing popular and academic interest in the persecuted church, dynamics of leadership in this context have received scant attention. Approximately two hundred million followers of Jesus face significant harassment, persecution, and/or the possibility of martyrdom because of their faith. Given the strategic importance of healthy, courageous leadership in these settings, encouraging and equipping persecuted Christian leaders has been identified as a priority by the Lausanne movement, the World Evangelical Alliance, other Christian confessions, and para-church ministries. While there is recognition that persecuted leaders themselves have much to teach the global church, there has been little research into their experience of leadership.

Almost all published theory in the field of leadership arises from relatively secure, free, entrepreneurial contexts. The case of leadership in the Meserete Kristos Church from 1974-1991 diverges

⁸⁹ Nkomo, “‘African’ Leadership and Management,” 373-377. Dickson et al., “Conceptualizing Leadership across Cultures,” 187, similarly note the danger of assuming cultural homogeneity within as well as across nations.

⁹⁰ Nkomo, “‘African’ Leadership and Management,” 377-380. Recognizing the impossibility of research from an objective, culturally transcendent vantage point, issues of reflexivity in this study are addressed in Chapter 5, in the context of methodology.

from the predominant context for leadership theory by its location in a non-Western culture and the conditions of persecution.

Although developed in American academic and business contexts, the leadership theory of Robert E. Quinn offers a promising conceptual lens for exploring the experience of persecuted church leaders. Conditions of crisis, Quinn argues, invite men and women to shift from concern for self-preservation to the “Fundamental State of Leadership” in which they exercise transformational influence, functioning with increasing purpose, integrity, love and creativity. An authentic transformational leadership paradigm interacting with complexity theory and positive organizational scholarship, Quinn’s theory focuses on the person of the leader, but with substantial awareness of the contextual field in which leadership is exercised.

For Quinn, authenticity is at the heart of transformational leadership, with the leader’s own person the pivot point for leading change in the world. All people, he argues, are potential leaders with the capacity to change the larger system of which they are a part. Within organizational systems, however, leaders tend to seek incremental change rather than the *deep change* necessary to interrupt cycles of *slow death* in which individuals and organizations remain stuck in entropic routines.

The moral authority to lead, according to Quinn, is grounded in one’s integrity and courage: a readiness to “go forth and die” which galvanizes the commitment of others. Contrary to pervasive transactional assumptions of the normal human state (comfort-centred, externally directed, self-focused and internally closed), the Fundamental State is a temporary psychological condition in which one becomes more purpose-centred, internally directed, other-focused and externally open. A person functioning in this state has the potential to spark a transformational social movement in an organization or society as others try to make sense of and respond to their positive deviance. One engaging in such authentic leadership supports exceptional organization effectiveness, particularly the domains of collaboration, creativity, competitiveness and control identified in the Competing Values Framework.

Those in contexts of comfort and freedom may enter this creative state of leadership by intentionally cultivating paradoxical practices like *reflective action* and *appreciative inquiry* or by asking transformative questions such as: “*What result do I want to create?*” “*What would my story be if I were living the values I expect of others?*” “*How do others feel about the situation?*” and “*What are three (or four or five) strategies I could use to accomplish my purpose for this situation?*” When faced with crisis –

such as persecution – however, one loses the option of comfort-centred, self-focused, externally driven, internally closed leadership. The crisis itself becomes a catalyst, forcing potential leaders to make a fundamental choice: either to shrink back or to “walk naked into the land of uncertainty”⁹¹ with God, functioning with creativity, purpose, integrity and love. In what ways did men and women who served as leaders in the Meserete Kristos Church experience this during the persecution of the Derg regime between 1974 and 1991?

⁹¹ Quinn, *Deep Change*, 3-12.

CHAPTER 3 – A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF LEADERSHIP UNDER PERSECUTION

What light does biblical theology shed on the experience of Meserete Kristos Church leaders during the Ethiopian revolution? How do themes of persecution and leadership emerge and intersect in Old and New Testaments? In what ways are they integral to the message of the Bible as a whole? The witness of Scripture is indispensable for practical theology's normative task, which is to use "theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations or contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide our responses, and learning from 'good practice.'"¹ Brian Rosner defines biblical theology "as theological interpretation of Scripture in and for the church," adding that, "It proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyse and synthesize the Bible's teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus."²

This chapter begins with a survey of published biblical theologies of persecution, highlighting key themes, with particular attention to the expectation that disciples of Jesus Christ will share in the suffering of their crucified Messiah. This is followed by an exploration of leadership in contexts of persecution, with attention to servant/slave and shepherd metaphors, and the role of *martyria* in New Testament leadership.

A. Persecution in biblical theology

The persecution of God's people is a pervasive theme throughout the Bible. Although a painful expression of human sin, persecution not only becomes a crucible in which genuine faith is refined and revealed, but a means through which the purposes of God are accomplished. A significant portion of the biblical canon – particularly the New Testament – was written in contexts of persecution by and for believers suffering because of their faithfulness to God. More important, God's supreme demonstration of holy love is revealed through the persecution of Jesus Christ, climaxing in his unjust death and paving the way for his subsequent resurrection and victory over sin, death and Satan. The church, as Ivo Lesbaupin notes, "was born amid persecution." Still, although Christian theology gives substantial attention to

¹ Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 4-5.

² Brian S. Rosner, "Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 3-11.

suffering – common to all humanity – the more specific theme of *persecution* has been largely neglected.³

Biblical theologies of persecution by Josef Ton, Scott Cunningham, and Glenn Penner are noteworthy exceptions. The 2009 evangelical *Bad Urach Statement* stands out as a systematic, biblically based summary and synthesis of global evangelical thinking about persecution.⁴

In his extensive study, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven*, Josef Ton explores the persecution of believers in Isaiah, Daniel, Job, intertestamental literature, the Gospels, Acts, Pauline and Petrine epistles, Hebrews, Revelation, and historical theology. Emphasizing both the sovereignty of God and human responsibility, Ton notes the foundational call of men and women to exercise dominion over creation in congruence with the character of Jesus Christ. Although suffering entered human experience because of sin, it has potential to produce good in and through those with faith in God, who uses

³ Ivo Lesbaupin, *Blessed Are the Persecuted: Christian Life in the Roman Empire, A.D. 64-313* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 59-60. Contemporary inattention to persecution is reflected in T. Desmond Alexander, and Brian S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), in which the topic is subsumed under the entry for “Suffering.” Thomas Schirrmacher and Godfrey Yogarajah, “Foreword,” in *Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom: Theological Reflections, Religious Freedom Series, 2*, ed. Christof Sauer and Richard Howell, (Johannesburg: AcadSA Publishing, 2010), 11-12, highlight the influence of persecution on theology in the early church and lament its displacement by the triumphalism of later state church political power. They urge the global church to embrace the work of leaders and theologians from settings of persecution to better understand Christian suffering in light of biblical theology. Glenn M. Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross: A Biblical Theology of Persecution and Discipleship* (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Books, 2004), pp.7-9, argues that the close biblical connection between discipleship and persecution has been neglected due to the predominant Western orientation of theological and biblical studies. In contexts where persecution is relatively light, biblical texts on persecution tend to be interpreted through a broader lens of general physical, psychological and spiritual suffering. Thomas Schirrmacher, *The Persecution of Christians Concerns Us All: Towards a Theology of Martyrdom* (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2008), 19-22; Patrick Sookhdeo, *The Persecuted Church, Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 32* (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 2005); Charles L. Tieszen, “Mission in Contexts of Violence,” in *Missions in Contexts of Violence*, ed. Keith E. Eitel (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2008); Harold D. Hunter, and Cecil M. Robeck, eds., *The Suffering Body: Responding to the Persecution of Christians* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006); 75-92; Josef Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven* (Wheaton, Illinois: The Romanian Missionary Society, 1997), xi-xvi, also identify the need for further work in developing a biblical theology of persecution.

⁴ In addition to these book-length theologies of persecution, Ronald Boyd-MacMillan, *Faith that Endures: The Essential Guide to the Persecuted Church* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2006), 101-119, includes a chapter identifying five sources of persecution for New Testament Christians (rulers, priests, merchants, mobs and families), the normativity of persecution for disciples of Jesus and a biblical definition for persecution. Other overviews of persecution in the Bible include contributions in William D. Taylor, Antonia van der Meer and Reg Reimer, ed., *Sorrow and Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2012); Wolfgang Haede, “From Genesis to Revelation: Persecution as a Central Topic of Scripture” (65-70), Marvin Newell, “In the Context of World Evangelism: Jesus, Persecution, and Martyrdom” (91-98), Antonia van der Meer, “The Teaching of Jesus on Suffering in Mission” (99-104), Margaretha N. Adiwardana, “Biblical Teaching on Suffering and Perseverance in Paul and Peter” (105-112), and “God’s Plan of Perseverance and Suffering in the Book of Revelation” (131-136). Eitel, ed., *Missions in Contexts of Violence*, includes Stephen M. Clinton, “The Biblical Contexts of Violence and Responses” (51-56), and J. D. Payne, “Missions in the Context of Violence: a New Testament Response” (57-73). Christof Sauer and Dwi Maria Handayani, “A Doxological Framework for Interpreting Discrimination, Persecution and Martyrdom” in *Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission*, ed. Hans Aage Gravaas et al. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 47-57, propose the glory of God as a theological starting point for understanding suffering for Christ, persecution and martyrdom.

persecution and martyrdom to achieve two complementary, parallel goals: to produce a Christ-like character *in us* and to advance his purposes *in the world*.⁵

God addresses sin, rebellion and evil by entering history through Jesus Christ, his incarnate Son, a suffering servant whose earthly life would end in “torture and martyrdom.” Suffering and self-sacrifice are not only central to God’s redemptive strategy, they are “the only method consistent” with his nature, Ton maintains. If God responded to hate with hate he would mimic Satan, “the originator of hate.” Instead, “God can only respond with love, because He *is* love, and by suffering and sacrificing Himself for the ones who hate Him, He expresses the essence of His own nature.”⁶

Aware of what he had to accomplish through his death, Jesus not only followed the pattern of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah, but called his disciples to follow his example, sharing both in his mission and his suffering. Still, Ton distinguishes between the cross of Jesus and the cross of the Christian. Whereas the death of Jesus is “a ransom for many,” his shed blood instituting a new covenant, “poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins,” there is no indication that he or his followers understood *their* suffering and death as having salvific power. Affirming the biblical testimony that “salvation is in Christ Jesus, and nowhere else,” Ton notes that Scripture is also “unmistakably clear that salvation cannot reach all the nations without the self-sacrifice of a messenger.” He observes that, “The cross of Christ is for propitiation, whereas our crosses are for propagation,” clarifying that “His cross worked vertically, reconciling us with God; our crosses work horizontally, delivering to others what Christ has procured for us all.” For disciples:

To take up your own cross and bear it means to voluntarily and sacrificially involve yourself in the job of building the church of Christ. It means that the main occupation of your life will now be witnessing Christ to others, making disciples, and teaching them to do all that Christ has taught you to do. This will of course consume your time and your material resources. It will most likely provoke ridicule and derision from others. It might demand that you leave your own country for the mission field, and it might even cost you your own life. This is your cross, and this is how you become a partner with Christ in fulfilling His purposes for mankind.⁷

⁵ Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven*, 3-5, 319-322.

⁶ Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven*, 425.

⁷ Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven*, 73-91, 290-291. In concluding comments about the Book of Revelation Ton highlights persecution as a context for nonviolent, loving witness to Jesus Christ: ...the key message in the Book of Revelation is that the only method God uses to bring the nations to Himself is through the testimony of Jesus Christ, propagated by His faithful witnesses, sealed with their blood in martyrdom, and vindicated by God through their resurrection. In God’s strategy, the use of force is counterproductive. It is true that one can bend and break people by force, but the result will only be more hatred and further revolt. Instead, God has determined to save the world by the foolishness of the cross of Christ and by the foolishness of the crosses of His children whom He has chosen and called for this very purpose. He will be consistent in using this unique method until He achieves His final goal. God will thus bring the nations to Himself by the sacrifice of His Son followed by the sacrifices of His other sons.

Ton asserts that when the Bible discusses persecution, it always includes “promises of great rewards in heaven” for those who endure faithfully. Careful to place disciples’ “worthiness” and their heavenly reward within a theology of grace, Ton understands that one’s position, rank and function in the kingdom of God is not earned, awarded based on merit or grounds for boasting, but is a gift from God secured through the sacrifice of Jesus. Even so, he concludes that God reserves “the greatest honor and glory for those of His children who go through sufferings, tortures, and martyrdom.”⁸

In his monograph *Through Many Tribulations*, Cunningham analyzes Luke’s theology of persecution in his Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, maintaining that it is not only a prominent literary theme, but conveys a compelling theological message. Persecution – primarily directed against Jesus in the Gospel and against his disciples in Acts – “is the common and sometimes climactic manifestation of the conflict between characters.” Cunningham summarizes Luke’s theology of persecution in six statements:

1. *Persecution is part of the plan of God.* Luke’s theological use of the word δέι places the death of Jesus and the suffering of his disciples within the sovereignty of God.
2. *Persecution is the rejection of God’s agents by those who are supposedly God’s people.* It is the result of unbelief in Jesus as the one who offers salvation.
3. *The persecuted people of God stand in continuity with God’s prophets.* As religious leaders opposed to Jesus are linked with their ancestors’ rejection of God’s messengers, Jesus and his disciples are tied to the prophets in their experience of persecution.
4. *Persecution is an integral consequence of following Jesus.* As Jesus prophesied, his disciples are persecuted because of their association with him, especially as they bear his name. Persecution is normative as the church gives witness to Christ.
5. *Persecution is the occasion for the Christian’s perseverance.* The chief teaching purpose of Luke’s treatment of persecution is the need for disciples to remain steadfast in their allegiance to Jesus in times of pressure and testing.
6. *Persecution is the occasion of divine triumph.* Disciples of Jesus can rely on God’s help during persecution. The Holy Spirit will give words for their witness to authorities. Sometimes they will experience miraculous protection from bodily harm, but more important, God will ultimately deliver them from evil powers. Persecution is not only unable to stop the spread of the gospel, but ironically functions as its catalyst as God uses the scattering of his messengers for his own purposes and glory.⁹

Glenn Penner’s comprehensive biblical theology of persecution and discipleship, *In the Shadow of the Cross*, considers the biblical basis for human rights, religious liberty and persecution in Old and New Testaments, making relevant connections with contemporary experience. Human rights and religious

⁸ Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven*, xi-xv, 421-436.

⁹ Scott Cunningham, *‘Through Many Tribulations’: The Theology of Persecution in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

freedom are grounded in the rights and responsibilities God imparts to human beings as his image-bearers. Although sin introduces suffering into the world, Genesis 3:15 anticipates Satan's defeat through the offspring of the woman, "but in a process of bruising and pain."¹⁰

Penner traces themes of righteous suffering through accounts of Abel, Lot, Abraham, Isaac and the oppression of Israel in Egypt. Those persecuted because of their allegiance to the living God include Moses, David, priests, prophets and other servants of God. Penner explores insights on innocent suffering in the Book of Job, imprecatory Psalms and Psalms cited to address persecution themes in the New Testament. He concludes that Scripture treats the suffering of God's people in four ways: 1) as punishment for sin, 2) as discipline for training and educating, 3) as the result of one's relationship and loyalty to God, and/or 4) to accomplish the purposes of God. The fourth dimension is developed in Isaiah's prophecies about the Servant of the Lord, who would reconcile the world to God through his suffering and death.¹¹ Turning to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, Penner considers the doctrine of divine impassability and whether it is biblically faithful to say that God suffers. Affirming that God is unchangeable, sovereign and "cannot be unconsciously or unwillingly moved," Penner insists that God nonetheless "suffers because He chooses to love."¹² Contrary to prevailing expectations for a Messiah in first century Judaism – including those of his own disciples, Jesus understood suffering and death as central to his mission. In Jesus, the

¹⁰ Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross*, 11-27.

¹¹ Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross*, 27-84, notes that the first case of persecution in the Bible – in which Cain kills Abel – "begins in a place of worship" as the brothers bring offerings to the Lord. Arising from jealousy, the death of Abel is seen by Jesus as an act of martyrdom (Matthew 23:35) and is described by John as an expression of spiritual conflict, particularly the world's hatred of those who belong to God (1 John 3:13). Moses is threatened with stoning, David is targeted by Saul's jealousy, eighty-five priests of Nob are killed by Saul and Doeg, prophets pursued and killed by Jezebel, Elijah flees to avoid persecution, Micaiah is imprisoned, Elisha is threatened with death, Hanani is imprisoned, Zechariah is executed, Uriah is pursued, arrested and executed, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego endure the fiery furnace, Daniel is thrown into the lion's den, and the whole Jewish people are targets of persecution in the Book of Esther. Psalms 22, 31, 34, 35, 41, 42, 43, 44, 69, 91, 116 and 118 are cited by New Testament writers in relation to persecution themes. Penner also explores Jeremiah's faithfulness to God despite years of rejection, persecution and humiliation, and in Daniel, the call to trust God alone amid pressure to compromise one's faith, pointing out that "Persecution tests the worthiness of those who will reign with the Anointed One; it shows that they are prepared to acknowledge His sovereignty over their lives."

¹² Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross*, 85-104. Although most fully manifest through the incarnation of Jesus, God's suffering is also evident in the Old Testament when his interaction with humanity brings him pain. Penner discusses God suffering both relationally and sympathetically. "Grieved in heart" by his people, God chooses to "have pity on His beloved, even though he has been wounded" by their unfaithfulness. When Israel cries out under the burden of slavery, God not only hears their groaning but in their affliction God "was afflicted" (Isaiah 63:9). God's solidarity with the church in its suffering can be seen in the words of Jesus to Saul on the road to Damascus: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4) Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 230, likewise contends, "Were God incapable of suffering in any respect, and therefore in an absolute sense, then he would also be incapable of love." John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ, Twentieth Anniversary Edition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 320-328 also wrestles with the notion of divine impassibility, arguing that "the cross of Christ is the proof of God's solidary love, that is, of his personal, loving solidarity with us in our pain."

incarnate Son of God, the vocation of the “anointed one” and suffering servant come together, culminating in his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead.¹³

Given the indispensable role of faithful suffering in the ministry of Jesus, it is unsurprising that the Gospels devote considerable attention to themes of persecution and martyrdom. Commenting on Jesus’ promise of blessing for persecuted disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, Penner notes that 1) persecution will be inevitable for his followers, who 2) would suffer “on account” of Jesus; 3) stand in the tradition of past prophetic messengers of God; 4) are called to love persecutors and seek their salvation; and 5) will receive great rewards in heaven. In Matthew 10:16-42, Jesus suggests that mission and persecution are inseparable as he commissions his disciples. “When done in the spirit of Christ,” Penner observes, “mission has always taken place in the shadow of a cross.” Even as Jesus sends his followers “as sheep in the midst of wolves,” he promises powerful help from the Spirit of God for their witness. Still, the Gospels (especially Mark) portray the failure of disciples who lack faith and courage, squabble about greatness, exhibit hardness of heart, fall asleep in Gethsemane, flee suffering, and even deny Jesus. Through forgiveness and restoration, however, failure does not need to be final. In the Gospel of John, Jesus prepares his followers for persecution to keep them from falling away. He assures them that no one can snatch them from the Father’s hand, and that the Holy Spirit would be their Advocate, enabling them “to remain in a relationship of love and trust in the face of the unbelief and hatred of the world.”¹⁴

Penner considers the prominence of persecution in the Book of Acts, where it is closely entwined with the spread of the gospel and the empowering of the Holy Spirit: “Just as the Spirit has empowered Jesus for His work, so the Spirit was needed to empower the disciples for theirs. Jesus knew that as the gospel was spread, His disciples would face the same opposition He had faced. He had trained them for martyrdom.” In a survey of fifteen major incidents of persecution in Acts, Penner observes that: 1) it

¹³ Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross*, 104-116; Penner gives special attention to the clash of messianic expectation between Jesus and his disciples, focussing on the account of Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Messiah in Matthew 16, the confusion of John the Baptist in Matthew 11, the Transfiguration (Matt 17; Mark 9; Luke 9) and the Ascension (Acts 1; Matt 28). Glenn Penner, “A Biblical Theology of Persecution and Discipleship,” in *Sorrow and Blood*, ed. William D. Taylor et al., 71-76, observes that, “Weakness, suffering, and sacrifice are God’s modus operandi. This is how God accomplishes his work: not through strength or compulsion but through love and invitation.”

¹⁴ Penner, *In the shadow of the cross*, 116-154, notes three biblically faithful responses to persecution: 1) Flight (in order to safeguard God’s mission; not merely for personal survival), 2) Fortitude, and 3) Fight (non-violently asserting one’s legal rights or engaging in civil disobedience). Commenting on Jesus’ farewell discourse in John 15-16, Penner concludes: “Persecution cannot and will not be stopped by persuasion, education or legislation. The world does these things simply because they do not know God. The world’s hatred is ultimately not rooted in hatred of Christian; it is rooted in hatred toward God.”

creates opportunity for witness to Christ; 2) when disciples flee they do not become silent but continue to publicly testify to Jesus; 3) opposition inevitably follows the preaching of the gospel; 4) persecution arises from varied sources and manifests in various ways. Penner suggests early disciples were ready to suffer and die for Christ and the gospel because they 1) clearly understood the sovereignty of God, 2) viewed suffering for Christ a privilege and honour, and 3) had a clear perception of the glory of martyrdom.¹⁵

Penner finds a multi-faceted theology of persecution in Paul's letters. Writing to Thessalonica, Paul uses the experience of persecution – his own and the church's – as a basis for mutual encouragement. His readers' faithfulness under persecution testifies to the genuineness of their faith and is evidence they are worthy of the kingdom of God.¹⁶ In 1 Corinthians Paul interprets his suffering to help the church grasp that "God's methodology of the cross is to be our methodology as well." In 2 Corinthians, Penner observes, the emphasis shifts to the cross of the Christian. He identifies themes from six passages addressing persecution: 1) believers share in the sufferings of Christ, who suffers with them as they participate in his mission; 2) as the church functions as a servant of God it is rejected by the world; 3) Paul's suffering is necessary for manifesting the life of Christ, enabling God's grace to reach more people; 4) suffering helps orient believers toward eternity as they anticipate God's final triumph; 5) Paul's suffering gives credibility to his ministry, 6) and offers evidence that he is a messenger of God and servant of Christ.¹⁷

Paul urges the Romans to be unashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ in a world in rebellion against God. In the fifth chapter the apostle calls believers to rejoice in suffering because through it God produces qualities in them which prepare them for glory. In the eighth chapter, the inheritance of God's children is contingent on their suffering with Christ. Although there is little overt teaching on persecution in Galatians and Ephesians, Penner notes that Paul challenges the Galatians to stop trying to avoid it. The cross of Jesus is central to the gospel and it is in this that he boasts; he considers the scars of his own torture to be "Christ's brand upon him, marking him as a slave." To the Ephesians Paul writes as a "prisoner for

¹⁵ Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross*, 155-167.

¹⁶ Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross*, 169-177. Paul affirms his readers for becoming "imitators of us and of the Lord," welcoming the message "in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit." In turn, the Thessalonians' faithfulness encourages Paul when he is persecuted and in distress. (1 Thess 1:6; 3:7-8; 2 Thess 1:4-5)

¹⁷ Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross*, 177-193. Penner suggests that the Corinthians found it harder to understand the role of suffering and persecution in disciples' experience because they had encountered less resistance to the gospel than believers in other communities. In 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16 he contrasts the power and wisdom of God – revealed in the cross of Jesus – with the so-called eloquence and strength of the world. To preach a crucified Saviour is to embrace "humiliation and weakness ... suffering and self-sacrifice," which "is God's way of action." (2 Cor 1:3-11; 2:14-17; 4:5-5:10; 6:1-13; 11:23-12:10)

Christ Jesus” for the sake the Gentiles, and bids them “not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.” He also encourages readers to stand firm against the opposition of a hostile world, drawing on the strength of Christ who has already triumphed over the spiritual rulers, authorities and powers of the present age.¹⁸

Penner highlights joy and persecution as intermingling themes in Paul’s epistle to the Philippians, noting echoes of Jesus’ admonition to “rejoice and be glad” when persecuted for his sake. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul reveals that in order to lead others to Christ, messengers of the gospel will suffer. He rejoices in his suffering because it “fills up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body.” This refers not to Jesus’ redemptive work on the cross, but to the preaching of the gospel.¹⁹

In 1 Timothy, Penner observes, Paul confronts three temptations triggered by opposition to the gospel: to 1) drop out of the battle, 2) change the message or 3) adopt a lifestyle conforming to society to avoid conflict. Paul points to the example of Jesus, affirms Timothy’s faithful confession of Christ and charges him to maintain it. Aware of growing pressure from imperial authorities and his own impending martyrdom, in his second letter Paul urges Timothy to respond to religious violence not with fear or shame, but with “God-given power, love, and self-control.” Maintaining that “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,” Paul calls Timothy to single-mindedly carry out his ministry even while suffering greatly, remembering the faithfulness of Jesus and the hope of reigning with him.²⁰

The book of Hebrews, Penner points out, was written to Jewish Christians who had suffered social rejection, isolation and humiliation for their faith. Called to persevere under pressure, they are assured that Jesus also endured trials and temptations and is therefore able to help them. As Jesus “learned obedience

¹⁸ Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross*, 194-206, observes that for Paul, “To be in Christ is to share not only His Sonship but also His rejection and death. In a world that does not know Him as Lord, such suffering is inescapable for those who would faithfully follow Him.” Although persecution is not good, “God is able to cause it to work together for our good and God’s glory,” using it as “the means by which we will be made ready to receive our inheritance.” (Rom 1:16; 5:1-5; 8:16-39; Gal 6:12-17; Eph 1:21; 2:2; 3:1, 10, 13; 6:10-20)

¹⁹ Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross*, 206-215. Like Paul, with whom they are partners “striving together as one for the faith of the gospel,” the Philippian church has suffered for Christ. This is a gift from God, which has resulted in benefits for Paul and others in Rome. In the first chapter, he describes how his imprisonment and suffering made an impact on 1) non-Christians in Rome, 2) Christians in Rome and 3) Paul’s own priorities. In chapter two, he meditates on the self-giving humility of Christ, whose suffering resulted in glory, urging his readers to follow his sacrificial example. One knows Christ as one participates in his suffering and resurrection, Paul emphasizes in the following chapter. Like Ton, Penner is careful to distinguish between the heavenly reward for which Paul strives and the gift of eternal life which is offered by grace alone. (Matt 5:6; Phil 1:3-2:18, 3:7-21; Col 1:21-29)

²⁰ Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross*, 216-226. Referring to his impending death, Paul joyfully describes himself as “a drink offering,” having “fought the good fight” and “finished the race,” knowing that he had fulfilled his call. During his first trial in Rome, Paul was not alone, but experienced the Lord standing by him and strengthening him as he had promised. (1 Tim 6:12-14; 2 Tim 1:6-16; 2:1-13; 3:10-13; 4:6-18)

from what he suffered,” so too for his disciples “suffering, persecution, and martyrdom are not the fated tragedies of a miserable earthly existence” but clearly indicate that they are in God’s “school,” being formed into his “image of holiness and righteousness.” Keeping in mind testimonies of faith from previous generations, readers are exhorted to not “grow weary and lose heart,” but to set their eyes on Jesus who “endured the cross, scoring its shame.” Those who persist in Christ despite torture and martyrdom are heirs of a “better resurrection,” great joy, and eternal rewards.²¹

Written to encourage Christians undergoing slander and persecution, Penner highlights the conviction in 1 Peter that suffering unjustly for Christ’s sake is a work of grace, evidence of God’s work in a person’s life. Like Jesus, believers are not to retaliate against those who cause their suffering, but entrust themselves to God who judges rightly. Those who suffer for the cause of Christ share in *his* suffering. Readers called to overcome fear by relying God, assured of God’s care and intent to restore, strengthen and establish them by his grace. Although faithfulness may not be rewarded in this life, persecution reveals genuine faith, which will “result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”²²

Penner emphasizes that the final book of the canon is a revelation of Jesus Christ, assuring first century churches facing intensifying persecution that “The battle is not over, though the victory has already been won through the sacrifice of the Lamb. He is risen and stands in your midst. Continue your faithful witness. God’s purposes are being fulfilled through your life and death. He is with you, as He promised. Do not lose hope. All things will be made new. The time of tears will soon be over.” A key theme in Revelation is the call of Jesus’ followers to give testimony (μαρτυρία), which involves suffering and death. The persecuted church overcomes Satan by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. Penner places this witness in the context of God’s plan of restoration which culminates in the final chapters of Revelation: “What began in Genesis, then was introduced in the Law, the prophets, and poets of the Old Testament, reached its climax in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and was given to the whole world through the sacrificial self-giving of God’s servants, who “loved not their lives even unto death” (12:11).”

²¹ Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross*, 226-233; Heb 2:18; 4:15; 5:8-9; 11:1-13:25. Penner observes that “It would seem that only in such an environment of resistance and suffering can a godly character be fully developed.”

²² Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross*, 235-247, calls attention to Peter’s double use of the phrase τοῦτο χάρις (“this is grace”) in 1:19-20 to show that “Peter defines grace as suffering due to one’s faithfulness to God and enduring.” (1 Pet 2:19-23; 3:7-17; 4:12-19; 5:5-12)

The experience of persecution, then, is not merely incidental to Christian discipleship, so Penner concludes, “A cross-centered gospel requires cross-carrying messengers.”²³

In their introduction to the *Bad Urach Statement: Toward Understanding Suffering, Persecution, and Martyrdom for the Global Church in Mission*, Christof Sauer and Richard Howell argue that triumphalist theologies such as the prosperity gospel leave the church ill-equipped “for the suffering that comes with its mission in the world.” Central to the *Bad Urach Statement* is a systematic biblical theology of suffering for Christ, persecution and martyrdom, reflecting consensus among the twenty-four participants of the September 2009 Bad Urach consultation. Between first and second comings of Christ, the statement asserts, the church proclaims and lives out the good news of the kingdom of God – inaugurated by Jesus but in tension with the old age until its visible consummation at the Lord’s return. In continuity with the persecution of faithful people of God in the Old Testament (particularly the prophets), disciples of Jesus follow the way of their Messiah through suffering to glory:

All Christian suffering for Christ and martyrdom has its basic foundational orientation and footing in Jesus Christ, the “faithful and true witness” (Rev 1:5; 3:14). He, who lived as the eternal Son of God with his Father in perfect bliss, took upon himself torture and death as an atoning sacrifice for the sin of rebellious humanity. He did so after his incarnation out of his free volition and in unwavering obedience. In this way he suffered the depths of all human pain in order to comfort us (1 Pet 2:21-24; Heb 2:14-18) and suffering became for him a school of obedience (Heb 5:8).²⁴

Tracing Jesus’ experience of persecution from early childhood to his crucifixion, the *Bad Urach Statement* emphasizes that to him, the cross was not “a tragic failure of his mission, but, rather its very fulfillment,” in accord with his prophecies about the Father’s plan to save the lost, the mission of the suffering servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53 and the sacrificial lamb that is led from suffering to glory (Psalms 22; 16; 110). Like Ton and Penner, the statement highlights the uniqueness of the substitutionary, redemptive death of Jesus on the cross, even as it serves as a model for his followers, who “are invited to participate in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his name.” When disciples suffer for Christ, it is “a continuation of the suffering of Christ.” In fact, “His disciples are treated today as he once was, because

²³ Penner, *In the Shadow of the Cross*, 250-260; Penner, “A Biblical Theology of Persecution and Discipleship,” 72, similarly says, “...there can be no discipleship without persecution; to follow Christ is to join him in a cross-carrying journey of reconciling the world to the Father.” Lesbaupin, *Blessed are the Persecuted*, 46, describes the continuing expectation of persecution for faithful Christians through the first three centuries of church history.

²⁴ Christof Sauer and Richard Howell, eds., *Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom: Theological Reflections* (Johannesburg: AcadSA Publishing, 2010), 13-18, 42-45. Organized by the International Institute for Religious Freedom, the Bad Urach consultation was sponsored by the Religious Liberty, Theological and Mission Commissions of the World Evangelical Alliance and the Lausanne Theological Working Group in preparation for the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, Cape Town 2010.

Christ lives in them and they speak and act with his authority. Their fate is bound to his. In the context of the prophecies of his own suffering, Jesus announces to his disciples that they also expect a similar fate. They would be at odds with the world that opposes God, just as he himself was (John 15:18-21)."

To take up one's cross as a disciple of Jesus is to give witness to him "even in a situation of persecution and martyrdom." Enduring faithfully in one's confession of Christ is essential for the eternal destiny of the Christian. The Father, Son, Holy Spirit and God's angels offer "comfort and help" for believers to persevere (though not necessarily to save their lives). The authors propose "that the individual's faith and the grace of God work together in a symbiotic fashion" to enable disciples' fidelity.²⁵

Although social hostility, state aggression and religious violence are leading sociological causes of persecution against Christian, its ultimate source is Satan, the *Bad Urach Statement* asserts. Defeated by Jesus on the cross, Satan fights a retreating battle but remains dangerous. Disciples are to engage in spiritual warfare using only the weapons and ways of Jesus: meeting falsehood with truth, evil with goodness, hatred with love and violence with self-sacrifice, "out of which arise new creativity, healing, and restoration." As Jesus the Lamb of God was sent "to defeat the great dragon and to destroy his works (1 John 3:8)," he likewise "sends us as lambs to defeat the wolves," some of whom will be led to repentance by Christian witness while others will be hardened further.²⁶

The *Bad Urach Statement* distinguishes between three types of martyrdom in the experience of Jesus and the church. Only Jesus is a *messianic martyr*, who makes forgiveness of sins and redemption available through the sacrifice of his life. Others, however, may join him as a *prophetic* or *apostolic martyr* who suffers vicariously as a representative of his or her community. A *community* or *church martyr* suffers for his or her confession of faith in Christ. While the work of Jesus as a messianic martyr is complete, Christ continues to suffer in the members of his body, who help to complete his suffering and bring the gospel to those who have not yet received it. Unlike Jesus, Christians never suffer alone, but always as part

²⁵ Sauer and Howell, eds., *Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom*, 45-47; 50-52. The statement suggests that: The individual's personal faith provides him or her with the conviction that he or she *must* hold on to the end no matter what the cost. This is a clear demonstration of faith since the individual values the promise of God and the hope of eternal life more than earthly life or personal safety. But at the same time, in recognition of the need for grace, the martyr acknowledges that he or she *cannot* hold on without divine aid. This inner tension between the *I must* and the *I cannot* provides the environment where martyrdom can serve both as a test of faith and as a demonstration of God's grace. The *I must* aspect drives the martyr to prayer and dependence upon God, who abundantly supplies grace to compensate for the *I cannot* aspect. God's helping presence does not dispense one of one's own responsibility to bear and to stand fast, which therefore is connected with faith.

²⁶ Sauer and Howell, eds., *Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom*, 47-53.

of a cloud of witnesses stretching across time, space, confessional and denominational divides. The authors observe that suffering and martyrdom build up the church as those enduring hardship are blessed by God, who imparts confidence and boldness to tell others about Christ. As seen in the testimony of Stephen, “Christ is particularly close to his own in a situation of suffering and martyrdom,” imparting “a measure of preserving grace” that exceeds what we receive under “normal” circumstances.²⁷

In Christ, suffering “becomes a mode of mission...done in weakness.” Martyrdom, then, “is the most radical form of missionary witness.” The *Bad Urach Statement* argues that “Suffering is a test for the genuineness of mission rather than a mishap to be avoided at all cost.” Although persecution “does not automatically produce visible and immediate church growth,” faithfulness under suffering will produce fruit, as Jesus promised, even if it will not be fully seen before his return to rule in power and glory. Their participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus assures Christians that no investment or sacrifice for the kingdom of God will be in vain. Although biblical prophecy foresees a “troubled final stage of human and church history,” a faithful church will, in the end, share in the victory of Jesus Christ. In joyful anticipation, his disciples await their returning Lord, judge of the living and the dead, who will make everything right and new. God receives honor through the life and death of his witnesses and honors those who suffer for him, giving them a share in Christ’s glory and joy. The authors affirm biblical promises of heavenly reward to the faithful, noting that, “The character formation and the testing of our faithfulness accomplished in suffering, persecution or martyrdom for Christ have clear corresponding results in heaven.”²⁸

²⁷ Sauer and Howell, eds., *Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom*, 53-58; Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 56, notes that while “Jesus suffered and died alone...those who follow him suffer and die in fellowship with him.” (Acts 7:55-56)

²⁸ Sauer and Howell, eds., *Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom*, 58-69, observe that “Mission with wrong and mixed motives will often quickly stop when the first signs of suffering occur. The mission of God needs to be accomplished in spite of and through suffering, persecution and martyrdom.” Regarding the nature of heavenly reward, participants in the Bad Urach Consultation agree “that this is a scriptural promise that we must not neglect as a source of comfort” and “the promise of a reward does not contradict salvation by grace alone.” Still, they note: “We are not in full agreement about the nature of the reward, whether there is the same reward for all Christians or whether there are different rewards for different people, including a special reward for martyrs. But we agree that the reward is the decision of the master. We found the imagery helpful, that Jesus is filling everybody’s cup to the brim with grace, but that we might not all have the same capacity for holding it.”

Considering ethics, the *Bad Urach Statement* clarifies that “persecution does not automatically lead to godliness.” Subject to temptation like others, persecuted believers need to pursue a life of holiness and love. Christians should neither seek persecution nor incite it. Following the example of Jesus, his disciples must never persecute or cause harm to others. In mission, the church ought “to avoid unnecessary offence,” acting wisely and rejecting unethical means and methods. Believers are to be loyal citizens who pursue the well-being of their community and nation, pray for authorities and “seek to live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness (1 Tim 2:1-2).” Still, when pressured to be unfaithful to God, followers of Jesus “must obey God rather than human beings.” (Acts 5:29)

Ton, Cunningham, Penner, and the authors of the *Bad Urach Statement* identify their own exposure to the realities of persecution, either through direct personal experience or the stories of others, as a significant spur to study the topic in the Bible. If persecution has been a critical but neglected theme in published biblical theology, it will surely be crucial for the church – whether in contexts of relative safety or peril – to build on this work for the sake of its discipleship and witness. Ronald Boyd MacMillan suggests that paying attention to contemporary experiences of persecution may enable the global church to rediscover elements of biblical truth easily missed when read from perspectives of comfort and privilege: “I think of the persecuted church like a morning sun that reveals what is already there in the Scriptures, truths that we may have missed. They illumine the central features of our faith that are found in the Bible but are so often ‘hidden in plain sight.’”²⁹

B. Leadership under persecution in biblical theology

How do themes of leadership intersect with persecution in biblical theology? A substantial proportion of persecution in the Bible is borne by leaders. Those who wish to damage the cause of the gospel often adopt the strategy prophesied by Zechariah: “*Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.*”³⁰ Even so, studies of persecution and leadership typically focus on one or the other theme without exploring the breadth and depth of interrelationship between the two. Despite a dearth of cross-pollination between these two themes in scholarly literature, there are obvious points of connection:

1. Much biblical teaching on leadership is embedded in contexts of persecution;
2. If it is normative for the people of God to be persecuted as a result of their faithfulness, this reality ought to shape expectations for leadership;
3. Leaders, by virtue of their call, are necessarily at the forefront of the church’s God-ordained mission, and will often bear the brunt of persecution.
4. If the church’s witness to Jesus Christ is bound to its union with him in his suffering, death and resurrection, then its leaders will fully embrace this mission without regard to personal cost, and will equip others to do the same, relying on the Holy Spirit, pursuing God’s agenda and glory, confident in the triumph of God’s reign.

God has built a need for leadership into the fabric of creation. At the climax of the opening chapter of Genesis, God calls men and women to share the task of overseeing a fruitful planet with him, giving

²⁹ Boyd-MacMillan, *Faith that Endures*, 305.

³⁰ Zech 13:7b; Matt 26:31. Potentially fruitful study of leadership under persecution could include the experience of Hebrew midwives under Pharaoh, Moses, David, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, the prophets (particularly Jeremiah and Daniel), the Servant Songs of Isaiah, the life and teachings of Jesus, Acts, the Epistles and Revelation.

them the mandate to rule over the creatures of the earth. With this delegation of responsibility, God signals a “preference for human agency” for accomplishing his purposes, anticipating a growing role for human leadership in the unfolding story. At their best, human leaders are *followers* who faithfully respond to the creative, redemptive, sustaining initiative of God and influence others to do the same. While Scripture uses various metaphors to characterize leadership, two stand out for their prominence in both Old and New Testaments: the servant/slave and the shepherd. Both are embodied in Jesus Christ, convey dimensions of God-honouring leadership amid persecution, and are considered in biblical theologies of leadership by Don Howell, Timothy Laniak, and Arthur Boers. The role of *martyria* in New Testament leadership, explored by Jack Niewold, is also significant.³¹

In *Servants of the Servant*, Don Howell shows how the term “servant of the Lord” functions as a title of honour in the Old Testament, applied to leaders “who discover a joyful abandonment to the will of the Lord.” The prophets, especially Isaiah, use the same designation for Israel. The “servant songs” of Isaiah foresee one endowed with the Spirit of God who would bring justice to the nations, bear sin, offer peace, restore Israel, and make salvation available “to the ends of the earth” through the servant’s own humiliation, suffering and death. Jesus uniquely fulfills this mission, and as the model servant of the Lord, sends his disciples “with authority to boldly proclaim the arrival of the kingdom of God,” and prepares them for the inevitable persecution that this mission will trigger. They struggle, however, to understand how servanthood and suffering could accompany messianic kingship. Howell notes that “To obey Jesus’ call to servanthood would involve a radical surrender of one’s natural pursuit of comfort, wealth, and recognition. The leadership training program of Jesus was not to end in a specified period with graduation, credentials, and a secure vocational setting.”

Howell particularly identifies qualities of sacrificial leadership in the apostle Paul, “a witness, whose sufferings bear the image of the Servant-Lord.” Like Penner and the *Bad Urach Statement*, he observes that Paul’s sufferings “authenticate him as God’s servant, identify him with the crucified and risen Lord, and edify the church. One who aspires to lead, that is, to influence others for the kingdom of God, must imitate Paul who himself imitates Christ (1 Cor 11:1).”

³¹ A. D. Clarke, “Leadership,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Alexander and Rosner, 636-640. The phrase “preference for human agency” is from Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 22, 248.

In his conclusion, Howell highlights the character, motive and agenda of servant leaders in the Bible. How does one develop the character – marked by faith, love and integrity – necessary for effective leadership? Based on his reading of Paul and bolstered by other biblical examples, Howell describes “proven character” as “the refined product that emerges from a process of testing” through suffering, which may include “physical hardship, emotional distress, and persecution encountered in obedience to God’s mission.” Servants of the Lord are motivated by a passion for God’s glory and the welfare of God’s people, and maintain “a laser-like concentration on God’s clearly stated agenda.”³²

In *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, Timothy S. Laniak explores shepherd imagery in the Bible, focusing on the prototypical leadership of Moses and David, while highlighting the Lord’s role as the true Shepherd Ruler of Israel. Both human leaders learn to trust YHWH as their personal shepherd in the wilderness before assuming leadership responsibilities. Moses serves as “under-shepherd” of God’s flock in the wilderness, called to represent the divine Shepherd in his leadership. It is the Lord’s presence, provision, protection and guidance which sustain both people and leader. The biblical account of David and his dynasty reveals a profound ambivalence about kingship. While accommodating Israel’s request for a king, the Lord does not want this royal institution to “unreflectively accumulate the conventional attributes and associations it had in neighbouring Near Eastern societies.” As the true shepherd of Israel, the Lord would initiate the call of its kings, hold them accountable, bless and judge them. Later biblical writers use pastoral language to condemn unfaithful leadership and anticipate “the compassionate rule” of “the coming Davidic shepherd Messiah.”³³

The corruption of leadership in Israel and Judah – manifested in “cultic apostasy, social injustice and dependence on political allegiances” – leads to the catastrophe of exile. Through the prophets, Laniak notes, the Lord not only warns of impending judgment, but promises something better – particular concerning leadership. In Isaiah, “a book laced with criticism for presumptuous rulers,” Davidic shepherd and Mosaic second exodus themes intermingle. In chapters 40-55, servanthood language describes both Israel and an individual with a “divinely ordained assignment.” Laniak notes that “Isaiah is clear about the ironies of biblical leadership: to rule is to serve and to suffer, and to lead is to be *both* shepherd and

³² Don N. Howell, Jr. *Servants of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 6-19, 141-146, 196-204, 277, 280-283, 296-301.

³³ Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 75-114.

sacrificial lamb.” Through Jeremiah, the Lord pronounces judgment on Israel’s shepherds, including kings, prophets and priests, and promises “a new covenant with a regathered flock.” In Ezekiel, the Lord likewise indicts the rulers of Judah for the suffering of God’s people with an extended exposé of their leadership in chapter 34, reasserts his ownership of this flock and promises to personally intervene to save, restore and lead them. In Zechariah, too, the Lord condemns the “worthless leadership” of his people, including false prophets, vows to personally rescue his flock, and institute a reign of peace and justice.³⁴

For each Gospel Laniak identifies dimensions of the shepherding work of Jesus, anchored in Old Testament traditions.³⁵ Significantly, in his exploration of leadership under the authority of Jesus, he focusses on 1 Peter and Revelation, in which shepherding and suffering are closely entwined. Peter encourages persecuted churches to endure trials with an eye to future glory, choosing holy living while suffering unjustly, remembering the example of Jesus, in whose sufferings they participate. Laniak argues that with Isaiah 53 and Ezekiel 34 in the background Peter develops a “Servant Christology” in which the suffering of Jesus is both a unique source of healing and a model for others. In the fifth chapter, Peter urges his fellow elders to “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them.” Laniak notes that “watching” functions as “a comprehensive summary of shepherding tasks,” including attentiveness “to threats that can disperse or destroy the flock.” Leaders are to serve eagerly, free of interest in personal financial gain, refusing to misuse authority, but modelling humility, leading by example. Based on his reading of 1 Peter, Laniak asserts, “Those who lead the flock of marginalized suffering members are to be exemplars in self-sacrifice.”³⁶

The Book of Revelation is particularly rich in shepherd and sheep imagery, portraying Jesus Christ as both messianic Lion/Lamb and ruling Shepherd. His followers persevere through suffering in order to “overcome” – the “ironic outcome of suffering unto death.” Highlighting the close connection between *martyria* (witness) and *martyrdom*, Laniak offers Revelation 14:4 as a compelling summary of discipleship: “They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.” Beyond death, this leads “to an eternity serving the Lamb,

³⁴ Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 115-170.

³⁵ Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 171-222. In Mark, Laniak traces themes of suffering kingship and second exodus, in Matthew, Jesus as the compassionate Davidic shepherd, in Luke, the seeking and saving shepherd, and in John, the self-sacrificing good shepherd and Passover lamb.

³⁶ Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 225-234. In a note, Laniak adds that “The idea of shepherds as examples for their sheep stretches the metaphor. Members of the church are not only sheep but also emerging shepherds who will become like their leaders in serving others.”

reigning with him forever – with their authority “eternally qualified by their role as *his servants* (22:3).”³⁷

In his summary of biblical shepherd leadership, Laniak observes:

1. It is comprehensive in scope. Although the term is used for prophets, priests and kings in the Old Testament and ruling elders in the New Testament church, there is a consistent measure for *good* shepherds: they are “accountable for the lives and well-being of the sheep.”
2. It holds together compassion and authority.
3. Bad or “false” shepherds use their position to serve their own needs, forgetting *whose* flock they serve. Shepherds are responsible *for* the flock, *to* the Owner.
4. It is grounded in a relationship of trust and obedience to the Lord as Sovereign Shepherd. Leaders are appointed by God and effective only as they are empowered by God’s Spirit.
5. The shepherd metaphor is closely connected to the ecclesial image of the flock of God, and is part of a larger redemptive narrative that depicts God’s leadership in wilderness settings.³⁸

In *Servants and Fools*, Arthur Boers underscores a radical critique of common leadership praxis throughout the Bible. In contrast to North American fascination with heroes and exceptional leaders, he considers frequently overlooked “countercultural, interrelated cautionary themes” in Scripture, including:

1. A “subversive suspicion about powers-that-be and rulers of this age” This emphasis questions the priorities, significance and justice of dominant leadership models and rulers.
2. Ongoing innovation as God’s people experiment with different types of leadership. Emerging forms often respond to something missing or not working well in other leadership models, and frequently involve devolution of power as God calls and empowers individuals normally marginalized and excluded.
3. Insistence that “leadership is never about power for the sake of power or being on the ‘winning,’ most influential side,” but seeking God’s priorities of justice, healing and freedom.

These themes, Boers observes, often play out in the wilderness.³⁹ In contrast to palaces and other centres of power, privilege and prestige, the wilderness is a marginal location where Israel learns about God and his leadership. Exploring the juxtaposition of the banquets of Herod and Jesus in the synoptic Gospels (Matt 14:1-21; Mark 6:14-44; Luke 9:7-17), Boers discusses the deadly competition between “kingdoms of this world” and the reign of God:

³⁷ Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 235-245.

³⁸ Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 247-251.

³⁹ Arthur Boers, *Servants and Fools: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2015), 44-100. Boers cites 1) Moses’ escape from Pharaoh’s wrath, his return to demand freedom for his people, and Israel’s learning en route to the promised land; 2) Elijah’s flight in response to Jezebel’s threats; 3) David’s evasion of King Saul and assembly of social rejects; 4) Nebuchadnezzar’s breakdown; 5) prophets, including John the Baptist, speaking from the wilderness; 6) Jesus, when hearing of John’s execution at a palatial party, withdrawing to a “deserted place,” and 7) Paul’s time in Arabia after his conversion.

The rivalry is physical (people die under Herod) and moral (drastically varying priorities of the two kingdoms). Worldly leadership prioritizes power and coercion; violence and fear play a large role. Jesus' kingdom is characterized by compassion, hospitality, healing.

Victory and success in worldly kingdoms mean conquering, defeating, and eliminating enemies. But in God's kingdom, faithfulness may mean martyrdom (as for John). Suffering is more likely than success. Persecution and misunderstanding are expected. Ministry frequently ends in tragedy. But no matter, as witnessing to God's priorities persists.

To embrace the kingship of God and the lordship of Jesus Christ relativizes all other loyalties, and is politically threatening to rulers with different priorities. Like faithful prophets who risk "the wrath of rulers and the opposition of fellow citizens" in obedience to God, Christian leaders must be ready to suffer. Boers identifies four leadership motifs in the teaching of Jesus: following, serving, suffering, and witnessing. Exploring connections between these themes, Boers observes:

Many Christians integrate the reality of Jesus' suffering into their theology. Yet we are also invited to *imitate* Jesus in his passion; not only did he suffer for and with us, but we will suffer also. Faithfulness results in our own costly service, too, whether we choose it or not. Our suffering ...is about cruciform *consequences* of faithfulness...This suffering directly results from faithfully proclaiming Jesus, and our affliction resembles his in that way.⁴⁰

Spurred by his reading of Richard Wurmbrand (a prominent advocate for the persecuted who suffered imprisonment and torture for his witness to Christ in Romania), and dissatisfaction with popularized understandings of "servant leadership," Jack Niewold proposes *martyriological leadership* as a distinctively Christian leadership paradigm. Servant leadership, he argues, needs to be understood in relation to the New Testament concept of *martyria*. Based on the function of the term *martyria* and its cognate *martys* in Luke/Acts, John, 1 Peter and Revelation, Niewold observes that it signifies "the act of Christian public proclamation and witness," with these characteristics:

1. Martyria, the witness of believers to Jesus, extends beyond the circle of apostles who physically walked with Jesus to include others who later become part of the church;
2. Martyria is self-referential in that the early church testifies to its own experience of Jesus. Witnesses like Paul describe the saving work of Christ within the framework of their own conversion;
3. Witness is intended to bring *krisis* to the hearer, leading to conversion.
4. Martyria is carried out by those who publicly testify to the saving work of Jesus.
5. Martyria entails identification with and participation in the sufferings and glory of Christ, although not necessarily death.

⁴⁰ Boers, *Servants and Fools*, 45-135. Boers contrasts Herod's compulsion to avoid personal suffering (even criticism from John the Baptist and embarrassment in front of his guests) with John and Jesus who understand "that even great suffering and death" are "not the end."

6. There seems to be a shift in the use of *martyria* through the New Testament. Whereas it signifies “a discrete act of witnessing” in earlier cases, it later characterizes “the portrayal of a lifestyle of habitual witnessing (and suffering).”⁴¹

While far from exhaustive, this brief survey highlights significant ways in which shepherd, servant/slave and witness themes in biblical leadership are embedded in a theology of suffering and persecution. As servants, under-shepherds and witnesses of Jesus Christ (who is himself the Servant of the Lord par excellence, Good Shepherd and Faithful Witness), Christian leaders inspire, challenge and empower others to pursue God’s priorities and mission, leading by example as they “share in his sufferings” in order to “also share in his glory” (Rom 8:17).

C. Martyriological servant shepherds: A synthesis of biblical leadership under persecution

What biblical foundations, then, undergird the normative task of practical theology in this case study, illuminating the experience of Meserete Kristos Church leaders under the persecution of the Derg regime? The above survey shows that themes of persecution and leadership are integral to the overarching narrative of Scripture, to the experience, example and salvific work of Jesus Christ, and to the vocation of his disciples. A number of facets of this biblical theology stand out for their relevance:

1. The living God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – relentlessly works to reconcile and restore his alienated, broken creation to himself; particularly seeking the salvation of sinful human beings entrenched in their opposition to him. God suffers in this mission, pursuing it with purpose, holiness, love and creativity – in covenant with Israel and supremely in Jesus Christ.
2. Salvation is made available only through the suffering and death of Jesus. His disciples are persecuted because of their allegiance and witness to him, which by God’s grace enables the gospel to reach others and results in the growth of the kingdom of God.
3. Although persecution is an expression of human sin, God uses it to produce Christ-like character in his people and to advance his agenda in the world.
4. Persecution is not exceptional but is a biblically normative context for leadership among followers of Jesus. Faithful leaders can expect to experience some degree of personal suffering and persecution as a result of their mission. This is not a matter of shame but joy as

⁴¹ Jack W. Niewold, “Beyond Servant Leadership,” *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership*, 1, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 118-134, and “Incarnational Leadership: Towards a Distinctly Christian Theory of Leadership” (Ph.D. dissertation, Regent University, 2006), 219-246. He notes that: “The word family that encompasses *martyria* consists of a number of relevant forms: *martys*, witness; *marturein*, to witness; *martyrion*, a sign given in recognition of something else; and *martyria*, a testimony or an act of giving testimony.” (236)

Valentin Novikov, “Exemplification of Martyriological and Authentic leadership,” *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership*, 6, no. 1 (2014): 92-112, exegetes Acts 5:27-32 (using socio-rhetorical analysis) to identify possible behaviors related to Niewold’s martyriological leadership theory. Novikov identifies 1) wisdom and understanding, 2) boldness, 3) obedience, and 4) courage (based in the risen Christ and peace from the Holy Spirit) as enabling behaviors for martyriological leadership, highlighting the essential role of the Holy Spirit in empowering witness amid the threat of persecution.

they participate in the sufferings of Christ and anticipate sharing his triumph in the consummation of the kingdom of God.

5. As servants and under-shepherds of Jesus, faithful leaders are not comfort-centered or self-focused, but motivated by passion for God's agenda and glory. Pursuing the well-being of God's people, leaders call them to rely in faith on their divine Shepherd for provision, protection and guidance, reinforcing the message of God through the integrity of their example.
6. As martyriological leaders, men and women will prioritize witness to Jesus, seeking the salvation of others – including their persecutors – even when it may lead to suffering or death.
7. To lead under persecution necessarily requires unreserved commitment, courage and reliance on the Holy Spirit, whose power is revealed in human weakness. When leaders fail, God invites them to repent, offering forgiveness and restoration.

Following in the steps of their master Jesus Christ, those who give faithful leadership in times of persecution are part of the “great cloud of witnesses” encouraging the global church to “run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus,” who “for the joy set before him... endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”⁴² Richard Osmer locates the normative task of practical theology in the prophetic office.⁴³ Given the significance of persecution and leadership themes in Scripture, the experience and voice of persecuted Christian leaders indeed offer a timely, prophetic message for the global church.

⁴² Hebrews 12:1-2.

⁴³ Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 129-153.

CHAPTER 4 – HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

What contexts shaped the experience of leadership in the Meserete Kristos Church during the years of the Derg regime? Why were leaders targeted for persecution? Under what conditions did they lead? Leadership is necessarily embedded in a multifaceted web of historical, cultural, political, environmental and social dynamics.¹ It is always shaped by – and in turn shapes – a particular environment; effective leadership behaviour in one time and place may be counterproductive in other circumstances. If the descriptive task is to ground practical theology in realities of human experience, it must identify relevant dimensions of context that give perspective to the subject of study.² This chapter, then, attempts to describe the milieu in which men and women in the Meserete Kristos Church exercised leadership during Ethiopia's revolutionary era. While unavoidably selective, this contextual survey addresses:

- A. Imperialism, national identity and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church;
- B. Christian mission history and persecution in Ethiopia;
- C. Studies of leadership in Ethiopian culture;
- D. Meserete Kristos Church beginnings, leadership formation, and Holy Spirit renewal;
- E. The Ethiopian revolution; and
- F. The experience of churches and leaders under the Derg.

A. Imperialism, national identity and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

Ethiopia, an island of Christianity, has made her own distinctive contribution to the Christian faith; for ever since her conversion to Christianity she has remained faithful, her age-old ties with the apostolic church uninterrupted.

– Emperor Haile Selassie, 1965

At the centre of the Ethiopian empire lay a unique synthesis of indigenous Christianity, allegiance to the king, and an epic historiography. Culturally anchored in the northern highlands but administered

¹ Alan R. Johnson, "An Anthropological Approach to the Study of Leadership: Lessons Learned on Improving Leadership Practice," *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*, 24, no. 3 (July & October 2007): 213-221, stresses the importance of understanding leadership practice in its socio-cultural context, and the challenges of this, since it tends to be "non-discursive" – located in deeply embedded concepts, values, behaviour and social relations; much leadership behaviour stems from implicit rather than articulated knowledge.

² Richard B. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 12.

from Addis Ababa, the twentieth century Ethiopian empire-state held peripheral regions and peoples within its orbit through military power, modernizing government bureaucracy, expanding transportation and communication infrastructure, education, and opportunities for individual advancement tied to an embrace of Ethiopian identity and vision for nation-building.

Traditional Ethiopian historiography locates the origins of the modern state in the ancient kingdom of Aksum, which arose on the highland plateau of Tigray in the sixth century B.C., creating an impressive legacy of trade, architecture, art and language. Tracing the lineage of Ethiopian emperors to a union between the biblical Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, “the great tradition” emphasizes continuity between a glorious past and contemporary political and religious order. The foundational narrative celebrates the arrival of Christianity in Aksum during the time of the apostles, emphasizing its institutional embodiment in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC), adopted as the state religion in the early fourth century A.D. Pietro Toggia argues that imperial history writing legitimized the mutual interests of religious and political ruling groups in Ethiopia. The royal chronicles, authored by church scholars serving as royal scribes, are key primary sources for Ethiopian history. Particularly formative, the fourteenth century *Kibre Negest* anchors the authority of the king in God’s covenant with the House of David.³

Amid the nineteenth century European colonial scramble for Africa, the Abyssinian kings Tewodros (1855-1868), Yohannes IV (1868-1889) and Menilek II (1889-1913) carved out their own empire, consolidated imperial authority and tripled the territory subject to Ethiopian government. Adding dozens of tribes and millions of people to the empire, their conquests to the south, east and west were energized by historic national myth and pride. The thirteenth century *Fetha Nagast* gives instructions for imperial expansion: “When you reach a city or land to fight against its inhabitants, offer them terms of peace. If they accept you and open their gates, the men who are there shall become subjects and give you tribute, but if they refuse the terms of peace and offer battle, go forward to assault and oppress them, since

³ Christopher Clapham, “Rewriting Ethiopian History,” *Annales d’Ethiopie*, 18 (2002): 37-38; Pietro Toggia, “History Writing as a State Ideological Project in Ethiopia,” in *Ethiopia in Transit: Millennial Quest for Stability and Continuity*, ed. Pietro Toggia, Melakou Tegegn and Abebe Zegeye, 5-30 (New York: Routledge, 2011); Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians: A History* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 14-44, 53-60; Mulatu Wubneh, and Yohannis Abate, *Ethiopia: Transition and Development in the Horn of Africa* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1988), 9-11, Harald G. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 1-11. For a complementary assessment of this historiography, see Alexandro Triulzi, “Battling with the Past: New Frameworks for Ethiopian Historiography,” in *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After*, ed. Wendy James et al., 276-288 (Oxford: James Currey, 2002); Richard J. Reid, *Frontiers of Violence in North-east Africa* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 14-30 explores how national mythology undergirded a sense of superiority in relation to neighbouring peoples.

the Lord your God will make you master of them.” John Markakis suggests that Menelik and his generals followed this direction faithfully as they advanced, giving rulers in their path the option of submission and tributary status, which would allow them to keep their positions. If one not only acquiesced to Ethiopian governance, but also converted to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, the door was open to full assimilation into the Abyssinian ruling class. Uncooperative rulers and their people could expect only harsh retribution.⁴

Richard Reid argues that Haile Selassie inherited an intrinsically unstable and restlessly violent state. Regent of Ethiopia under Empress Zawditu from 1916 to 1930, Haile Selassie ruled as emperor from 1930 until he was deposed in 1974. Educated by Roman Catholic missionaries, as well as at Ethiopia’s first modern educational institution – the Menelik School – Haile Selassie envisioned a united Ethiopia, established on Abyssinian foundations, entering a new era of modernization and international engagement. He led Ethiopia into the League of Nations (1923), brought in anti-slavery measures (1924), introduced the nation’s first written constitution (1931), a new banking system and national currency (1931), created government ministries, and prioritized the building of new roads, hospitals and schools. Following the Italian invasion and occupation (1935-1941), Ethiopia entered a period of post-war reconstruction, in which Haile Selassie’s government further centralized its administration, continuing its program of modernization in education, health care, industry and commerce.⁵

Bahru Zewde notes increasing autocracy in Haile Selassie’s rule, reaching a peak after his return to power in 1941. Although the Revised Ethiopian Constitution of 1955 introduced universal adult suffrage and the creation of an elected Chamber of Deputies, it embedded real power in the Emperor whose person was declared “sacred,” and whose authority was grounded in his “imperial blood” and the anointing of the church. The centrality of northern highlands culture was entrenched in the designation of Amharic as the official language, intended as a vehicle for linguistic unity among the empire’s more than eighty ethnic and linguistic groups.⁶ Despite the presence of a substantial Muslim minority, practitioners of traditional

⁴ Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 131-208; John Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers* (Suffolk, UK: James Currey, 2011), 89-107; Reid, *Frontiers of Violence in North-east Africa*, 49-128; Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 26, 74, insists that “The Amhara expansion was not merely an extension of brute power,” but that political conquest was accompanied - and often preceded - by the dissemination of Amhara cultural influence in language, religion, moral values, and political style.”

⁵ Paul B. Henze, *Layers of Time: a History of Ethiopia* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 188-210, 229-281; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 116-180; Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*, 109-129; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 208-218, 256-262; Reid, *Frontiers of Violence in North-east Africa*, 129.

⁶ Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1974*, (London: James Currey, 1991), pp 128-149, 201-225; *The Imperial Constitution of 1955*, Paul H. Brietzke, *Law, Development, and the Ethiopian Revolution* (East

animist religion, a historic Jewish community, Roman Catholics and evangelical Christians, the constitution reaffirmed the close relationship between empire and state church:

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, founded in the fourth century, on the doctrines of St. Mark, is the Established Church of the Empire and is, as such, supported by the State. The Emperor shall always profess the Ethiopian Orthodox Faith. The name of the Emperor shall be mentioned in all religious services.

...The Emperor has the right to promulgate the decrees, edicts and public regulations of the Church, except those concerning monastic life and other spiritual administrations.⁷

Calvin Shenk argues that Haile Selassie's direct involvement in the EOTC – initiating, encouraging, controlling, and scrutinizing change – increased the church's dependence upon him, and rendered it organizationally subordinate to the state. Even so, his capacity to exercise political control of the EOTC was tempered by the church's power to confer or withdraw imperial legitimacy. Still, in the constitution, in practice, and in the imagination of the nation, church and king continued to represent the heart of a centralizing empire-state, inviting those on the periphery to join the grand narrative of a Christian Ethiopia – ideally in the Amharic language.⁸

Like any state-endorsed historiography, the traditional Ethiopian narrative privileges a particular power structure and people associated with it. Christopher Clapham observes that,

From the viewpoint of the great tradition, Orthodox Christians, and notably those who speak Amharic and Tigrinya, are Ethiopia, whereas other peoples merely *become part of* Ethiopia, either at times when they are incorporated within the boundaries of the modern Ethiopian state, or else when they associate themselves with that state, through conversion to Christianity, use of the Amharic language, or employment in some capacity by the state itself.⁹

Recent decades have seen ferment in the field of Ethiopian history as the “great tradition” has been deconstructed: first by Marxist scholars, and more recently from Oromo and Eritrean perspectives. Within

Brunswick, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1982), 21, 102-103; Edward Kissi, *Revolution and Genocide in Ethiopia and Cambodia* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 3; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 262-263; Toggia, “History Writing as a State Ideological Project in Ethiopia,” 23; Brietzke, *Law, Development, and the Ethiopian Revolution*, 21.

⁷ Articles 126 and 127, cited by Brietzke, *Law, Development, and the Ethiopian Revolution*, 102-103.

⁸ Brietzke, *Law, Development, and the Ethiopian Revolution*, 102-103; Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*, 125-126. Calvin E. Shenk, “Church and State in Ethiopia: From Monarchy to Marxism,” *Mission Studies*, 11, no. 2 (1994): 203-226, observes that Haile Selassie was involved in EOTC affairs by: 1) personally initiating change; 2) exercising control over the church by the ecclesiastics he appointed or approved; 3) closely relating to changes initiated by the church. Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896-1974* (Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1995), 180, notes that upward mobility was based not on Amhara ethnic identity but fluency in the Amharic language.

⁹ Clapham, “Rewriting Ethiopian History,” 40; Øyvind M. Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia: The Growth and Persecution of the Mekane Yesus Church, 1974-85* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 15-22, discusses socio-political, ethno-political and religio-political dynamics of “centre” and “periphery” in the Ethiopian empire.

modern Ethiopian historiography¹⁰ some continue to treat Ethiopia as “a single complex system,”¹¹ emphasizing its continuities with the kingdom that traced its past to Aksum (“Ethiopianists”).¹² Others portray Ethiopia as an artificial colonial construct (“anti-Ethiopianists”).¹³ Still others take a mediating position, recognizing “both the deep historical trajectories of the Ethiopian state...and its Amharisation and oppressive characteristics.”¹⁴

Clapham notes that the three decades preceding 1974 were paradoxically the most peaceful in the violent history of Ethiopian regional politics, despite the coercive nature of the underlying political and social structure.¹⁵ Where did leaders in the Meserete Kristos Church find themselves in relation to the centre and peripheries of the Ethiopian empire on the eve of the socialist revolution? Many were part of a rising urban elite – educated, Amharic-speaking, loyal citizens ready to contribute to the needs of a modernizing Ethiopia. In many ways close to the cultural and political “centre” of their communities and nation, their identity and status as model Ethiopians was nonetheless ambiguous, complicated by their fervent evangelical Christian faith.

¹⁰ Both Donald Crummey, “Ethiopian Historiography in the Latter Half of the Twentieth Century: A North American Perspective,” *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 24, no. 1 (June 2001): 7-24, and Bahru Zewde, “A Century of Ethiopian Historiography,” *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 23, no. 2 (November 2000):1-26, date the beginning of modern Ethiopian historiography to the 1960s.

¹¹ Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*, 25.

¹² Crummey, “Ethiopian Historiography,” 9. In his seminal work, published on the eve of the 1974 revolution, Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*, 40-68, posits that the unity of Ethiopian experience is not dependent on its colonial history, but rests on three patterns: 1) a continuous process of interaction between differentiated Ethiopian peoples; 2) the existence of pan-Ethiopian culture traits; and 3) a characteristic model of response to the periodic intrusion of alien peoples and cultures. Other prominent Ethiopianist works include Donald Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: From the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*; Henze, *Layers of Time*; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*; Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia*; Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*.

¹³ Clapham, “Rewriting Ethiopian History,” 43, argues that the most thorough attempt at a counter-history is Bonnie K. Holcomb, and Sisai Ibssa, *The Invention of Ethiopia* (Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1990), who portray Ethiopia as a colonial “invention,” a common theme in subsequent works. Mohammed Hassen, *The Oromo of Ethiopia: A History 1570-1860* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990) sets the standard for alternative histories. Asafa Jalata, *Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, 1868-1992* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), contends that an alliance between European imperialists and Ethiopian colonists enabled the latter to build their empire by colonizing the Oromo.

¹⁴ Kjetil Tronvoll, *War and the Politics of Identity in Ethiopia: Making Enemies and Allies in the Horn of Africa* (Suffolk, UK: James Currey, 2009), 25; James et al., *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After*; Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*; Clapham, “Rewriting Ethiopian History”; Toggia, “History Writing as a State Ideological Project in Ethiopia,” call for a critical historiography that avoids the reductionism of both Ethiopianist and anti-Ethiopianist perspectives.

¹⁵ Christopher Clapham, “Controlling Space in Ethiopia,” in *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and After*, ed. James et al. (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 9-31.

B. Christian mission history and persecution in Ethiopia

How has Christian mission been understood and experienced in Ethiopia? What shape has it taken in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and in other missionary movements? How did Ethiopians perceive evangelical Christianity prior to and during the revolutionary years of the Derg?

It is unclear when the gospel of Jesus Christ first arrived in Ethiopia, but there were undoubtedly Christian believers in the Aksumite kingdom well before Christianity became the state religion in the fourth century. EOTC tradition traces its arrival to the ministry of the eunuch baptised by Philip in Acts 8. There is evidence, too, that small communities of believers formed in urban centres when Christian merchants from the Greco-Roman world shared their faith in Christ with local people.¹⁶ With the conversion of Aksumite King Ezana, however, Christianity began to spread following state-supported missionary praxis. Girma Bekele identifies five epochs of Ethiopian Christian mission history: 1) the introduction and establishment of Christianity under Aksumite rule (325-650); 2) the restoration of the church missionary movement under the Zagwé dynasty (1137-1270); 3) monastic revival under the restored Solomonic dynasty (1270-1769); 4) the *Zemene Mesafint* (Era of the Princes) (1769-1855); and 5) the modern era.¹⁷

1. The establishment of Christianity under Aksumite rule

With the royal family as his first converts, Frumentius, the first *Abune* (patriarch) of the Ethiopian church, led the establishment of Christianity as the state religion of Aksum about 330 AD. He initiated liturgy and sacraments, appointed priests and deacons, and translated part of the Bible into vernacular Ge'ez. Given the patriarchal structure of Aksumite society, the king's embrace of Christianity greatly facilitated its expansion among the people. The conversion of Ezana gave his subjects incentive to claim Christian identity without necessarily coming to personal faith in Christ. Counting on government support from the beginning, the church did not experience persecution as it did in other places. The missionary strategy of the church, then, was bound to the "strength or weakness, expansion or retreat of the state."¹⁸

¹⁶ Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia: Resistance and Resilience* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2009), 16; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 34-35. Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 6-8, notes that by the third century, Aksum's elites had heard about the faith from Christian traders, and not only discussed it at court philosophically, but also in political and economic terms.

¹⁷ Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 140-197.

¹⁸ Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 6-8; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 34-35; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 16-17; Calvin E. Shenk, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Church's Understanding of Mission," *Mission Studies*, 4, no. 1 (1987): 4-20. According to tradition, Frumentius and another Christian Syrian boy were victims of a shipwreck and brought to the Aksumite royal court as slaves. Gaining trust through their faithful service,

Although little is known about evangelism in this early era, traditional sources highlight the influence of “The Nine Saints,” a group of monks mostly from Syria who led a missionary movement using four methods: 1) Christianizing pagan temples and erecting church buildings throughout the kingdom; 2) developing Ethiopic liturgy and literature to introduce monastic life; 3) translating the Bible into Ge’ez, and 4) creating permanent Christian learning centres to train local candidates for church service. Monasteries became hubs of evangelistic activity where monks created liturgy, music, symbols and iconic art as vehicles for conveying the gospel. Land grants from the king and wealthy citizens assisted the missionary enterprise, and established the church as a land-owning institution, dependent on the state.¹⁹

2. The restoration of the church missionary movement under the Zagwé dynasty

Despite political confusion associated with the decline of Aksum beginning in the seventh century, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church continued to expand, while consolidating its doctrine, ritual and organizational structure. With the rise of the Zagwé Dynasty in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the political and ecclesiastical centre of gravity shifted south. Ethiopian Christianity gained new adherents as Christian kings imposed their religion, language and political organization on newly seized territories.²⁰

3. Monastic revival under the restored Solomonic dynasty

When Yekuno Amlak established the “restored” Solomonic dynasty following the overthrow of Zagwé rule in 1270, the church entered a period of monastic vigor, leading to a surge in organized mission to non-believers. Although institutional church leaders had little vision for evangelization, monastic clergy

they were eventually freed and continued to serve as advisors in the palace until Prince Ezana was ready for the throne. At that point, Frumentius travelled to Alexandria, was appointed as bishop to Ethiopia by Athanasius and returned to begin his new ministry in 327 or 330. Sergew Hable Selassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270* (Addis Ababa: United Printers, 1972), 104, cited by Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 146-149, contrasts the dynamics of the public spread of Christian faith in Ethiopia with the experience of Christian evangelism in the pre-Constantine era of the Roman Empire. Whereas Christianity under imperial Rome first thrived in the lower echelons of society and spread by voluntary adoption, in Ethiopia the reverse was true.

¹⁹ Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 156-157; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 36-39; Shenk, “The Ethiopian Orthodox Church’s Understanding of Mission,” 5; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 17.

²⁰ Henze, *Layers of Time*, 42-56; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 10-16; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 40-53; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 18-19. Factors in Aksum’s decline may have included soil degradation, deforestation, a strengthening Persian Empire, and local rebellions. Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 157-161, argues that the process of indigenizing Christianity in Agew culture in this period blended elements of Judaic and pagan belief and practice with Christian faith in these regions. One impressive legacy of the Zagwé dynasty is the rock-hewn church structures of Lalibela, built on conquered land, designed to re-create Jerusalem, symbolizing the spiritual significance of the holy city in its architecture and establishing a place of pilgrimage for believers. The distinctive “Hebraic accent” of the EOTC also solidified in this period. While Amharic replaced Ge’ez as the vernacular language of the empire, the church retained Ge’ez as its sacred language, preserving linguistic continuity at the expense of effective communication. Girma characterizes the church’s missionary strategy as “acting as the shadow of the expanding imperial kingdom.”

spread Christian faith in newly conquered territory, sometimes at the invitation of local communities. In general, they emphasized continuity between traditional religion and Christian faith. Church buildings, for example, were often erected at sacred pagan nature sites or temples; “Christianization” often did not require significant change for converts as old and new religious ideas were fused.²¹

In the mid-fifteenth century, Emperor Zara Ya’qob gave fresh impetus to EOTC mission with an aggressive policy of evangelization to reform the spirituality of his subjects. Missionary strategy relied heavily on the use of symbols (such as the cross), devotion to Mary, delivering pagans from demonic powers, and turning their temples into churches. Zara Ya’qob, a former monk, published hagiographical accounts of Mary and the saints that would greatly influence the church’s theology and mission. Although anxious to consolidate Christian power over areas acquired by his predecessors, Zara Ya’qob failed to lead subjects into a freely embraced Christianity involving real transformation in belief and worldview. Instead, his production of legendary works turned converts’ attention from biblically-based catechism to hagiography-dependent spirituality. Among non-Christian communities, the church was closely identified with the empire, and conversion associated with Christian political domination.²²

A very different reform movement arose under the leadership Abba Estifanos, a fifteenth century monk, who upheld the centrality of Jesus as the only mediator between God and humanity, and argued that faith be grounded exclusively in the Bible. Criticizing the fusion between royal ideology and Christology, he and his followers opposed prostration before the cross, icons of Mary and the emperor. They challenged the power and influence of the clergy, emphasized the limits of the emperor’s spiritual authority, and encouraged the value of work, social involvement and care for the poor. Emperors (especially Zara Ya’qob) and clergy took offense to Estifanites, charging them with hating the cross and being *tsere Mariam* (anti-Mary). Branded a heretic, Estifanos was tortured and died in prison. Following his death, many of his followers were also captured, tortured and killed.²³

²¹ Henze, *Layers of Time*, 56-76; Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 161-169; Steven Kaplan, “Themes and Methods in the Study of Conversion in Ethiopia: A Review Essay,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 34, no. 3 (August 2004): 373-392; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 17-29; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 53-60; Shenk, “The Ethiopian Orthodox Church’s Understanding of Mission,” 5-11; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 21-23.

²² Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 163-166; Henze, *Layers of Time*, 68-72; Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*, 74; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 24-29; Shenk, “The Ethiopian Orthodox Church’s Understanding of Mission,” 11-12.

²³ Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 234; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 44-46.

During the traumatic sixteenth century Islamic attacks by Ahmad Gragn, churches were burned, books, icons and monuments destroyed, and many Christians renounced their faith under threat of death. Portuguese soldiers intervened on behalf of Ethiopian rulers, paving the way for Jesuit missionaries to be welcomed to the royal court. Decades later, in 1622, Emperor Susenyos converted to Roman Catholicism. His attempt to establish it as the new state religion sparked a civil war that ended with his abdication of power and the expulsion of the Jesuits from Ethiopia. The effort to turn Ethiopia away from the Orthodox faith entrenched a xenophobic attitude in Ethiopian society, especially toward missionaries, and led both church and state to seek isolation from foreign influence. Catholics were labeled *tsere Mariam*, which later became a generic label for all non-Orthodox Christians and a powerful symbol for those who are “other.”²⁴

In 1634, not long after the departure of the Portuguese Jesuits, the first Protestant Christian missionary arrived in Ethiopia with the newly appointed EOTC *Abune*. Ecumenically oriented, German Lutheran Peter Heyling hoped to bring Bible-centred renewal to the EOTC that would spark indigenous passion for sharing the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. Heyling was killed in 1652 while travelling in Egypt. His mission legacy includes his translation of the Gospel of John into Amharic and a reform community within the EOTC later known as the “Evangelical Association.”²⁵

4. The *Zemene Mesafint* (Era of the Princes)

The political upheaval of the *Zemene Mesafint* (1769-1855) was a time of missiological stagnation in the EOTC – and fresh initiatives in Protestant and Roman Catholic missions in Ethiopia. In this *Era of Princes*, the nation was divided between rival regional groups, with the king in Gondar a puppet in the hands of his regents. The power of both church and central state declined. EOTC mission was hindered in non-Amhara regions by the church’s stance on slavery. Although officially opposed to the slave trade, its members nevertheless owned slaves, an offense to potential converts. Despite its weakness, Orthodox Christianity was seen as the glue holding the nation together amid the chaos of competing regional forces. As the *Zemene Mesafint* wore on, the Ethiopian region received unprecedented interest from Europe, much

²⁴ Henze, *Layers of Time*, 83-100; Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 168-169; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 30-40; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 81-108; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 25.

²⁵ Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 198, 204-205; Henze, *Layers of Time*, 99; Johannes Launhardt, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa (1919-1991), With special reference to the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and the Addis Ababa Synod* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 22-24; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 65-66.

of it economically driven, but also new missionary initiatives from both Protestants and Catholics. The imperial ban on foreign missionary activity fell away in the absence of central political authority; princes of each small kingdom welcomed foreigners who could facilitate access to European technology.²⁶

5. The modern era

Following his re-creation of the Solomonic monarchy, Emperor Tewodros II (1855-1868) laid the foundation for a new era in Ethiopian mission history. Confident God had chosen him to rule, Tewodros set out to restore the empire to its former glory and blaze a modernizing trail for future kings. In the interests of national unity, he tried to end religious controversy by decreeing *Tewahedo*²⁷ doctrine the only core tenet of the Ethiopian church. Opposed to the expansion of Islam and the practice of primal religion, Tewodros supported EOTC monks who worked to convert their adherents. In exchange for support from EOTC Abune Salama III, he deported the influential Lazarist missionary Giustino de Jacobis. Despite his zeal for uniting Ethiopia politically and ecclesiastically, Tewodros embraced Protestant missionaries as allies in his quest for modernization. He favoured skilled worker-missionaries who could offer education in the trades while quietly giving instruction in spiritual matters, assigning them to spheres of influence where they could teach but not baptize. Any converts won through their ministry would be baptized by EOTC priests into the national church. Sharing the missionaries' conviction that the Bible is the final authority in spiritual matters, Tewodros allowed them to distribute copies in Amharic.²⁸

Yohannes IV (1868-1889) opposed all non-Orthodox Christian religion. Strenuously upholding *Tewahedo* doctrine, he zealously pursued religious uniformity, expelled foreign missionaries, and decreed

²⁶ Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 24-25; Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 169-171, 198-207; Henze, *Layers of Time*, 119-127; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 48-62; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 119-142; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 26, 65-67. In the late 1820s, the *Church Missionary Society* of London arrived in Ethiopia with the same goal as Peter Heyling: to revitalize the ancient church through the Word of God, making the Bible available in Amharic. Despite attempts to be ecumenically sensitive, they were unable to avoid debate over Christological doctrine or the intercessory role of Mary and the saints. They also had to respond to the needs of believers ousted from the EOTC for straying from church tradition. Political unrest and doctrinal tension eventually forced the closure of the mission. In the late 1830s, Lazarist Roman Catholic missionaries began work among the Tigre in the north, trying to guide Ethiopian Christianity toward an indigenized Catholicism that would lead to unity with Rome. Capuchin Franciscans opened a mission among the Oromo in the south, emphasizing Catholic faith built on Western traditions rather than accommodating Ethiopian customs. The two divergent Catholic mission strategies led to northern churches using Ethiopian liturgy and those in the south adopting the Latin rite.

²⁷ Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 26-27. Literally meaning "indivisibly united," *Tewahedo* "confesses the perfect unity of two natures, divine and human in the person of Christ, without confusing and without separation."

²⁸ Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 27-42; Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia*, 201-205; Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 171-173, 200-207; Henze, *Layers of Time*, 133-143; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 63-72; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 143-161; Shenk, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Church's Understanding of Mission," 12-13; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 26-27, 67-69.

the mass conversion of pagans, Muslims, Jews and Catholics. Addressing the people of the Wello region he said: “We are your apostles. All this...used to be Christian land until Gagn ruined it and misled it. Now let all, whether Muslim or Galla [Oromo] believe in the name of the Jesus Christ. Be baptized! If you wish to live in peace preserving your belongings, become Christians.” Christian “heretics” were given two years to conform, Muslims three, and those considered pagan, five. Any who resisted conversion faced confiscation of their property. One man had his tongue cut out. Forced conversion led many to a superficial embrace of Christian faith. Such converts came to be known as “Christians by day, Muslims by night.”²⁹

Rather than returning to their home countries, some missionaries joined the newly established *Swedish Evangelical Mission* (SEM) based in Massawa, Eritrea, where a “Bible movement” arose among EOTC members in the early 1860s. Persecuted Orthodox Christian clergy found refuge at the SEM mission post and become part of a nucleus of believers who would play a key role in the Ethiopian evangelical movement.³⁰

Menelik II (1889-1913) continued the empire-building work begun by Tewodros and Yohannes, culminating in the creation of modern Ethiopia, its independence against European colonial aggression secured by the defeat of the Italians at Adwa. From the newly established capital, Addis Ababa, Menelik introduced a central bank, national currency, western-style education, a railroad, postal system, telephone and telegraph systems, and cabinet government.³¹ More moderate than Yohannes, Menelik appointed individuals from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds to office, while promoting Amharic culture and Orthodox faith. He supported the missionary work of the EOTC in conquered territories, which followed earlier patterns of targeting local elites for conversion, baptizing people and building churches. Soldier-settlers (*neftegnas*) taught Christianity and acted as godparents to converts, helping them adopt the language, culture and religious traditions of the church. The association of the EOTC with the ruling elite,

²⁹ Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 27-30, 70-71; Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 42-59; Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia*, 207-215; Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 203, 207-208; Henze, *Layers of Time*, 144-160; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 72-90; Shenk, “The Ethiopian Orthodox Church’s Understanding of Mission,” 12-13; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 162-176. Yohannes not only sent EOTC priests to work as missionaries in the area; he lived there to personally supervise mission progress, ordering people to erect church buildings and pay tithes to parish priests.

³⁰ Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 207-208.

³¹ Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 60-92; Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia*, 215-225; Henze, *Layers of Time*, 160-187; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 91-112; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 176-208.

however, contributed to a negative assessment of Orthodox Christianity among local people. The effectiveness of the church's mission was not enhanced by its exclusive use of Ge'ez, a dead language.³²

Tibebe Eshete observes that the expansion of Christianity continued to follow a state-sponsored top-to-bottom pattern that did little to encourage indigenous populations to genuinely embrace Christian faith.³³ In his survey of EOTC mission history prior to the twentieth century, Calvin Shenk concludes:

Mission was usually from a position of strength – the superior power of the monk over the local practitioner, the superior power of the Christian kingdom, or the power of the nobles over the masses. Christianity spread by the migration of Christian families, merchants, soldiers, and governors. A powerful instrument for evangelism was the presence of the local worshipping church. Persons responded for varied reasons; many were obliged, others sought advancement through identification with superior power, and some responded to a spiritual quest.³⁴

Still, Menelik's policy of religious toleration marked a turning point for evangelical Christian mission in Ethiopia. Foreign missionaries began to come in small numbers, welcome if they focussed on medicine and modernization without undermining the EOTC. Indigenous missionaries nurtured by the Swedish Evangelical Mission were especially effective in this era. Eritrean priests, former slaves and converts of Oromo origin embraced the evangelical doctrine of salvation through personal faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ while retaining membership in local Orthodox churches. The Oromo ex-slave Onesimus Nesib was not only an effective pioneer evangelist, but also translated key works of Christian literature, including the first full Bible, into Oromifa.³⁵

When Menelik rescinded the ban on evangelistic missionary work in 1904, Onesimus began to work with Karl Cederquist, a Swedish Lutheran missionary who built a residential education centre with a health station and other social services, while hosting a small congregation of believers using an Amharic translation of the Orthodox liturgy. Cederquist formed leadership networks among new Christian communities in Wellega and Addis Ababa, laying the foundation for a national evangelical movement. Despite the desire of indigenous leaders to stay grounded in EOTC tradition, they nevertheless came into conflict with church officials regarding salvation doctrine, heightened by their own opposition to offering

³² Johnny Bakke, *Christian Ministry: Patterns and Functions within the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1987), 108-110; Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 177-180, Shenk, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Church's Understanding of Mission," 13-14; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 30-35.

³³ Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 34.

³⁴ Shenk, "The Ethiopian Orthodox Church's Understanding of Mission," 15.

³⁵ Kebede Hordofa Janko, "Missionaries, Enslaved Oromo and their Contribution to the Development of the Oromo Language: An Overview," in *Ethiopia and the Missions: Historical and Anthropological Insights*, ed. Verena Böll et al. (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005): 63-76.

mass for the dead, the mediating role of Mary, veneration of the cross and icons. Local EOTC clergy eventually condemned those with evangelical convictions as heretics, pushed them out of the church, denied burial rights for their deceased relatives and refused to baptize their infant children. The evangelical congregations they began – with those that would emerge from the work of other Lutheran missions – would eventually form the *Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (EECMY).³⁶

When Regent Ras Tafari Makonnen ascended to the throne in 1930, he fully embraced his new title: "By the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, King of Kings of Ethiopia, Elect of God." In pursuit of modernization, he introduced institutional reforms to the established church, encouraged publication of the Bible in Amharic for wider readership and welcomed foreign missionaries prepared to contribute in the fields of education, health and industry. During his regency (1916-1930) a number of mission societies began work in Ethiopia.³⁷

Haile Selassie not only saw missionaries as allies in his quest for modernization, but recognized their capacity to provide spiritual care in the south, where the EOTC had failed to find significant support. Prioritizing evangelism and church planting, Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) found particular success among the rural peoples of the south. Early converts effectively shared the gospel with their own tribal groups, to whom they were sent as missionaries. Members of indigenous evangelical communities called themselves *amagnyoch* (believers) rather than "Christians," to avoid offending the Orthodox Church. SIM established schools for basic literacy, primarily to enable converts to read and understand the Bible. Wary of letting education become a distraction from the central task of evangelism, they did not embrace it as a vehicle for pursuing social transformation or make it a high priority.³⁸

³⁶ Gustav Arén, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia: The Origins of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus* (Stockholm: EFS Forlaget, 1978); Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 50-54; Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 208-211; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 71-75, 99-100.

³⁷ Verena Böll et al., "Introduction," *Ethiopia and the Missions: Historical and Anthropological Insights*: xviii; Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 182-184; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 37-43, 75-76. Agencies included the *United Presbyterian Mission* (1918, U.S.), *Swedish Mission BV* (1921, Sweden), *Mission to the Jews* (1923, U.K.), *Sudan Interior Mission* (1927, U.S.), *Society for the Propagation of the Gospel* (1928, U.K.), *Hermannsburg Mission* (1927, Germany), and the *Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society* (1932, U.K.); Launhardt, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa*, 29-69, addresses the early work of these missions in the capital city.

³⁸ Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 77-83; Launhardt, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa*, 162. See Brian L. Fargher, *The Origins of the New Churches Movement in Southern Ethiopia, 1927-1944* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) for the early history of SIM in Ethiopia; E. Paul Balisky, *Wolaitta Evangelists: A study of religious innovation in southern Ethiopia, 1937-1975*, *American Society of Missiology Monograph Series 6* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2009), for the role of indigenous evangelists in this gospel movement. Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 212-218, critiques SIM's policy of providing education only to the primary level (usually ending at grade four) for most Ethiopians, in contrast to the high standards of education provided to missionary children.

During the Italian occupation (1936-1941), the EOTC faced pressure from the Italians, who intended to establish Roman Catholicism as the national faith of Ethiopia. Attempting to weaken the EOTC, the Italians terrorized, killed and tortured priests and church supporters. Later they placed the church under colonial administration and used paid collaborators to undermine it.³⁹

Ethiopian evangelicals were persecuted by both the colonial administration and the EOTC. Presenting themselves as liberators to the peoples of southern Ethiopia, the Italians expropriated mission properties, dismantled their institutions, expelled missionaries and discouraged converts from meeting. In the absence of missionaries, small indigenous evangelical communities organized around local leaders and continued to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Suspecting it was an expression of resistance, possibly connected to Ethiopian patriotic forces, the Italians arrested and imprisoned church leaders, flogging and physically abusing some. A small number were killed for their faith. Even so, it was a time of explosive growth for the movement. In Wellega (a centre for Lutheran mission) and in the Welayta-Kembata-Hadiya triangle (a centre for SIM's work), movements toward Christ were underway with local leadership. By the early 1950s, there were between ninety and a hundred thousand evangelical Christians in Ethiopia.⁴⁰

Following the defeat of the Italians in 1941, Haile Selassie worked to re-establish his authority and his nation's sovereignty vis-à-vis their British liberators and began a new round of reforms to solidify his administration, facilitate reconstruction and further development.⁴¹ Expanding education and medical facilities were priorities. Given his government's limited resources, the emperor continued to value mission agencies as partners in modernization. To create legal space for their work – while trying to appease an EOTC constituency hostile toward foreign missionaries – the government's 1944 Missions Decree divided the country into “closed” and “open” areas. Closed areas (mainly in north and central Ethiopia) would be

³⁹ Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 150-177; E. Paul Balisky, and Lila W. Balisky, “The Ethiopian Church and Mission in Contexts of Violence: Four Historical Episodes,” in *Missions in Contexts of Violence*, ed. Keith E. Eitel (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2008): 219-229; Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia*, 233-234; Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 182-183, 214-215; Henze, *Layers of Time*, 216-235; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 147-154; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 219-249; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 85-87.

⁴⁰ F. Peter Cotterell, *Born at midnight* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973); Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 214-215; Launhardt, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa*, 71-87, 106; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 76-77, 85-93. SIM missionaries estimated about a hundred men and women embraced evangelical Christian faith prior to their departure, in response to their ministry. They returned in the early 1940s to discover a movement encompassing tens of thousands of new believers.

⁴¹ Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 178-206; Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia*, 234-244; Henze, *Layers of Time*, 235-252; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 151-159; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 250-262.

the exclusive domain of the EOTC. There, foreign missions could provide education, medical care and social services and instruction from the Bible, as long as they taught doctrine common to all Christian denominations without promoting sectarian views. They were also not allowed to proselytize EOTC adherents. Tibebe Eshete observes that in the open areas of the south and southwest, Orthodox Christian faith was weak or nonexistent. In the east and northeastern open areas, Islam was dominant. Missionaries could teach and preach the Christian faith of their denominations in these regions provided they did not disparage EOTC theology and practice. Addis Ababa was designated open to all missions.⁴²

During the occupation, leaders of churches emerging from the work of the Lutheran SEM shared a vision for establishing a national evangelical church. Organizing in 1941 (with the blessing of SEM), they began to gather Ethiopian evangelical Christians from various doctrinal and mission backgrounds under one national umbrella. In 1959, the church was officially established as the *Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Mekane Yesus* (EECMY), known for its blend of Lutheran theology with local culture, liturgy and ritual rooted in Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. In 1963, SIM churches, largely reflecting Baptist theology, organized their own denominational structure, the Evangelical Believers' Association which evolved into the *Qale Heywet Church*. Mekane Yesus and Qale Heywet churches continue to be the two largest evangelical Christian denominations in Ethiopia.⁴³

Despite Haile Selassie's attempts to reform and revitalize the EOTC, Girma Bekele notes that "as the church of the imperial power" identified with Amhara and Tigray elites, it remained the church of the *status quo*. By and large, it has seen Protestants as "heretics who have betrayed Ethiopianism in favour [of] western 'imported' religion and customs."⁴⁴ It was in this context, amid the rapid spread of the evangelical movement and suspicion from Orthodox Christians, that Mennonite missionaries arrived in Ethiopia.

⁴² Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 35-36; Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 215-216; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 93-97. The Missions Decree also stipulated that Amharic was to be the only medium of secular and religious education in Ethiopia.

⁴³ Bakke, *Christian Ministry: Patterns and Functions*, 93-117; Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 221-225; Launhardt, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa*, 105-122, 141-149; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 99-101.

⁴⁴ Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 10-11, 232; Bakke, *Christian Ministry: Patterns and Functions*, 121, notes persecution of evangelical believers in Gamo Gofa, Welayita, Sidamo and Wollaga included imprisonment, church closures and attempts to silence evangelists by local EOTC leaders beginning in 1951. In response to a series of appeals, the emperor worked to ensure the respect of religious freedoms in these regions.

C. Studies of leadership in Ethiopian culture

How has leadership been understood and practiced in Ethiopian cultures? What studies shed light on traditional social and ethnological contexts for leadership? How are leaders chosen? What expectations do they face? How have leadership values and patterns evolved in modern Ethiopian society? Although the literature on Ethiopian leadership is scant, a variety of studies offer perspective. Some consider Ethiopian experience broadly through the lens of western leadership theory; others focus on the particularities of leadership in tribal tradition, denominational history and mission, or the national political sphere. Together, they illuminate the cultural milieu in which Meserete Kristos Church leadership emerged in pre-revolutionary Ethiopia and developed during the years of the Derg regime.

1. Geert Hofstede: Cultural Dimensions Theory

Geert Hofstede's research based on his influential cultural dimensions theory considers Ethiopia within the region of East Africa. Relative to other global cultures, the region scores high on the dimension of *power distance*, reflecting a context in which leadership typically assumes hierarchy, accepts inequality and values centralization. Low on Hofstede's *individualism* scale, Ethiopia functions as a collectivistic society in which loyalty to group members is paramount. High on the dimension of *masculinity*, the region values decisive and assertive leadership. With high preference for *uncertainty avoidance*, Ethiopians tend to be predisposed toward rigid codes of belief and behaviour, valuing precision and resisting innovation. Low on the scale of *long-term orientation*, Ethiopians are prone to lead with great respect for tradition, with a view toward the past and present more than the future.⁴⁵ Although Hofstede's dimensions of culture have been validated and used by a large number of researchers, his theory, methodology and conclusions have been subject to significant critique.⁴⁶ His broad conclusions about African cultures, for example, have been challenged due to the relatively narrow study sample from which they have been generalized.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind: Intercultural Cooperation and its Importance for Survival*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010).

⁴⁶ Marcus W. Dickson et al., "Conceptualizing Leadership Across Cultures," *Journal of World Business*, 47, no. 4 (October 2012): 183-192. Brendan McSweeney, "The Essentials of Scholarship: A Reply to Geert Hofstede," *Human Relations*, 55, no. 11 (2002): 1363-1372, argues that Hofstede overgeneralizes the relevance of local data, ignores disconfirming evidence and advocates a deterministic notion of national cultural causality. Galit Ailon, "Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Culture's Consequences in a Value Test of its own Design," *Academy of Management Review*, 33, no. 4 (2009): 885-904, focuses on Western cultural biases in Hofstede's work. Richard Bolden and Philip Kirk, "African Leadership: Surfacing New Understandings through Leadership Development," *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 9, no. 1 (2009): 69-86, caution that by reducing the study of leadership across cultures to comparison of cultural value indices Hofstede and others oversimplify cultural variations and neglect other significant

2. Johnny Bakke: Tribal and EOTC contexts for evangelical leadership

Johnny Bakke, *Christian Ministry: Patterns and Functions within the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus*, explores leadership in Sidama and Oromo tribal contexts and in the EOTC as background to a careful description of leadership experience in Ethiopia's Lutheran churches.

a. Leadership in Sidama and Oromo cultures

Leadership authority in traditional Sidama society is lodged in a council of elders that functions in an age grade system known as *luwa*. The *luwa* group in power may include men of almost any age, but older men dominate, as wisdom is associated with advancing age. Elders meet under certain trees to make decisions about community policy, resolve conflicts, and give advice, discussing issues until reaching consensus. Individual authority in the *luwa* group is based on perceptions of one's courage, wealth, generosity, physical soundness, and ability to make a compelling argument. For a Sidama man, the most important event in their life is promotion to eldership, a privileged status which exempts one from daily chores, hard labour and military service. To maintain credibility, elders are expected to be somewhat lonely, avoiding close involvement with others that might reveal their own character. Elders are also seen as holy, ritual experts who possess mystical power to promote fertility and well-being; in Sidama traditional religion, they share authority with *qallicha*, specialists in spirit possession.⁴⁸

Traditional Oromo leadership is based on the *gada* system, in which classes (*luba*) succeed each other every eight years, taking on military, economic, political and ritual responsibilities. The term of service for each *gada* class begins and ends with a ceremony of power transfer. The highly democratic system is well-suited for semi-nomadic life dependent on fair distribution of water and grazing land, shared well maintenance and defence. Oromo groups unable to continue semi-nomadic life have mostly abandoned the *gada* system. Even when losing its political and military importance, however, it continues as an ideological system used for choosing ritual leaders.⁴⁹

influences such history, geography, demographics, religion, and individual differences. Where relationships have been identified between cultural values and leadership preferences, the effect is small, partial and insufficient to predict or explain likely leadership behaviours or outcomes.

⁴⁷ Stella Nkomo, "A Postcolonial and Anti-colonial Reading of 'African' Leadership and Management in Organization Studies: Tensions, Contradictions and Possibilities," *Organization* 18, no. 3 (May 2011): 365-386.

⁴⁸ Bakke, *Christian Ministry: Patterns and Functions*, 33-39.

⁴⁹ Bakke, *Christian Ministry: Patterns and Functions*, 39-46. Oromo traditional religion also has other ritual experts (*qallu*), comparable to Sidama *qallicha*.

b. Leadership in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

Bakke identifies three categories of clergy in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church: the deacon/priest, the chorister/scribe (*debtera*) and the monk. At the top of the church hierarchy, the *abune* (patriarch) was appointed by the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Church until the EOTC was granted autocephaly in 1951. Next to him was the *ichege*, who served as the emperor's confessor and advisor, leader of church administration and head of all monasteries. In local communities, any Christian man could potentially become a deacon, priest or *debteras* based on a personal sense of call. Many were also motivated by a desire for land, offered to clergy instead of salary. To retain access to land, families of priests or *debteras* often passed their churchly vocation from one generation to the next. Very young boys – even infants – were sometimes ordained as deacons, as parents placed them on the path to priesthood.⁵⁰

Highly focused on liturgy, the clergy of each local church consists of at least two priests and three deacons serving at the altar, and a group of *debteras* in charge of song and dance. In their role as father confessor, priests also give spiritual care to families, offering guidance regarding major decisions, leading prayer, listening to confession of sin, prescribing penance, ritually purifying homes, conducting circumcisions, baptisms, funerals and ceremonies for the dead (*teskar*).⁵¹

Monasticism has played a central role in Ethiopian church life. Monks may be ordained or lay, young or old, celibate, widowed or married, literate or educated, a hermit or live in a community, absorbed in prayer and fasting or engaged in worldly pursuits. Bakke observes that the little preaching traditionally done in the EOTC was primarily by monks bringing a message of judgment and call to repentance.⁵²

c. The influence of traditional leadership patterns in the EECMY

Bakke explores the influence of EOTC, Sidama and Oromo leadership patterns in the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY). Orthodox priests were traditionally seen as part of the leading class in society, a social position shared by early evangelical leaders, who accepted the EOTC priestly *qes* – a desired term of respect. Bakke suggests this association with EOTC priestly status has been unhelpful for ministry. Informally, Oromo EECMY believers refer to pastors as “luba,” conveying the idea of being elected by the people, honoured and serving without seeking payment. Bakke argues that this term

⁵⁰ Bakke, *Christian Ministry: Patterns and Functions*, 55-62.

⁵¹ Bakke, *Christian Ministry: Patterns and Functions*, 62-73.

⁵² Bakke, *Christian Ministry: Patterns and Functions*, 73-75.

– which combines political and spiritual leadership – has served the church well in many ways, but an assumption that the luba has capacity to curse as well as bless creates distance between pastors and others in the church. Oromo EECMY pastors, then, have tended to be seen as a new ruling class having the last word in all situations. In Sidamo, evangelical Christians were ostracized from tribal society. Refusing to participate in ceremonies and sacrifices in honour of ancestors, they were excluded from work, fellowship, common aid, care and security. In response, they formed a new community in which they shared spiritual fellowship and reconstituted tribal institutions of mutual aid; elders and evangelists comprised the primary leadership roles in the congregation.⁵³

With the creation of the EECMY in 1959, leadership patterns became more clearly defined, with standardized ordination processes and administration of sacraments. Pastors would administer sacraments, evangelists preach and teach. Bakke observes that a “somewhat hierarchical” structure emerged, with voluntary evangelists at the bottom and pastors at the top. As church ministry came to be increasingly seen as the domain of ordained pastors, evangelists began to regard their position as a step en route to the more desirable role of pastor. Theological education for pastors became a high priority as the EECMY continued to grow. Building on earlier initiatives, the Mekane Yesus Seminary opened in Addis Ababa in 1960, offering a traditional seminary curriculum with specifically Ethiopian subjects such as Ge’ez and the study of the EOTC. Regional theological training centres were also started to address an acute shortage of pastors. Bakke notes a growing clericalism in this time, with young seminary graduates often having difficulty integrating into local communities after their education into “alien thought patterns.” In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the EECMY assembly made significant attempts to open pastoral ministry to non-

⁵³ Bakke, *Christian Ministry: Patterns and Functions*, 122-143, notes that the Oromo term “luba” is used less than it once was, particularly among educated believers. He also highlights the role of schools founded by indigenous evangelical leaders in the early twentieth century among the Oromo in Wollega. Their pioneering work educated leaders for society and helped shape strong lay leadership for evangelical believers.

Bakke observes that Sidama believers who had been elders in traditional society would almost certainly become church elders. Apart from the structure of the luwa system, however, elders assumed they were elected for life. In 1956 the *Norwegian Lutheran Mission* (NLM) noted that as many as half of elders were “non-communicant” and did not qualify as elders in Lutheran polity – mostly because of polygamous marriage. The mission responded with an education initiative, beginning Bible schools at most mission stations. Soon elders were chosen from among those who had received instruction. The number of communicant elders increased, while their authority was untouched.

When the NLM tried to introduce indigenous pastors into local churches, viewing them as leading elders, it soon discovered that elders viewed pastors as competitors. An underlying issue was caste. Many pastors were mission school graduates from the poorest and most neglected families of Sidamo society. In general their social position was well below that of the average church elder. Whereas Oromo Lutheran churches in Wollega held the office of pastor in high esteem, those in Sidamo did not, largely because of the established leadership of former traditional elders in the congregations. Sidama evangelists, on the other hand, did not replace any position in traditional society, but shared the gospel of Jesus Christ despite opposition from leaders of possession cults and others.

professionals, but synods and congregations resisted. Although the ideal of highly educated pastors was a structural bottleneck inhibiting ministry, the growth of the church hinged far more on the preaching of the evangelists than the work of pastors. Despite the strategic value of the evangelists' ministry, the institutional church did not generally give much attention to this ministry.⁵⁴

3. Balisky and Cotterell: Leadership in the Qale Heywet Church

Paul Balisky and Peter Cotterell offer insight into the form and context of leadership in their histories of the evangelical movement that grew into the Qale Heywet Church. Balisky, *Wolaitta Evangelists*, summarizes the strategy of Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) missionaries for establishing new Christian communities in Wolaitta, a model that would be embraced by indigenous evangelists, who “told the good news to anyone who would listen, expecting some listeners would be converted; they taught the converts the rudiments of Christianity; they baptized the converts and celebrated the Eucharist with them; and they assisted the new believers to establish a new religious community.” The imprisonment of about seventy amagnyoch leaders by the Italian occupiers in 1940 brought increased solidarity to the movement, as families and friends worked together to bring food to their fathers in prison. In prison, the leaders sang, prayed, studied the Bible together, and shared their faith in Jesus with other prisoners.⁵⁵

Peter Cotterell, *Born at Midnight*, describes a defining moment in the history of the amagnyoch movement when in 1933 the SIM field council addressed the question of training for indigenous evangelists. Wary that extracting students from their social and cultural context would create a professionalized class of church leaders disconnected from their communities, the mission rejected the idea of establishing a centralized school, but instead encouraged the formation of Bible schools at each mission

⁵⁴ Bakke, *Christian Ministry: Patterns and Functions*, 144-209, 259-260, notes that after the opening of MYS, the church continued wrestle with an acute shortage of pastors. In 1967, for example, the Western Synod had 157 congregations and preaching points served by an average of one pastor for eleven locations. Regional theological training was offered to equip evangelists to serve as assistant pastors with those more qualified. Pastors often lived and worked far from their families. Parishioners complained that pastors only occasionally visited some congregations. Launhardt, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa*, 125-140, also discusses the formation of Lutheran institutions for theological education, including Mekane Yesus Seminary.

⁵⁵ Balisky, *Wolaitta Evangelists*, 308-309, 315-316. Unlike their EOTC counterparts, Wolaitta evangelists did not confine their proclamation of the gospel to their own “religious” buildings, but carried it to all parts of society: with the Amhara in courts, with practitioners of traditional religion at their places of worship, and with the marginalized, intermingling with ordinary people, preaching wherever and whenever they had an opportunity. Balisky describes the evangelists as pilgrims continually on the move, preaching, baptizing and training leaders, uninterested in personal promotion. Although some would settle as pastors in congregations they started, generally they continued moving toward mission frontiers.

station. Later, in the absence of missionaries – amid the rapid growth of the church during the Italian occupation – amagnyoch communities developed an indigenous structure for self-governance.⁵⁶

4. Donald Levine: Amhara social hierarchies

Although not concerned with leadership per se, historian Donald Levine observes that Amhara social relationships are largely organized on the basis of hierarchical patterns and individualistic association. Relationships within households, communities and church reflect carefully defined status hierarchies marked by gradations of honour and authority. Levine characterizes the Amhara household, for example, as “a vertically ordered set of status-roles.” The head of household is addressed with the honorific term *getoch*, “master,” or *getay*, “my master.” All others know their place in relation to each other and are expected to show the appropriate deference. Siblings are ranked based on age and sex; the master’s children do not necessarily hold higher rank than other dependent relatives or servants. Levine suggests that the hierarchical foundation of Amhara culture is manifested in two common patterns of behaviour: 1) the frequent use of gestures expressing various degrees of deference, and 2) a readiness to comply with the demands of any superior, while withholding any direct criticism of his ideas or actions. Any disagreement with one holding a higher rank would only be expressed indirectly.⁵⁷

5. Leadership and authority in Ethiopian political culture

In his study of the Ethiopian socialist revolution, political scientist Christopher Clapham gives passing attention to dynamics of authority and leadership in the nation’s political culture. Although political relationships could be described as feudal – resting on control of arable land and peasant labour – Clapham notes that the system did not result in a hereditary ruling class or caste. Described as a “tough man” system, it allowed anyone – particularly successful soldiers – to rise to positions of authority by demonstrating capacity for leadership. Authority was maintained by ongoing personal success. Subordinates would hide discontent behind a veneer of deference: “power was respected only so long as it was effective. A leader capable of holding power, and therefore assuring the welfare of his subjects and supporters, was looked up to with unbounded reverence. Once he failed, he was abandoned. Political loyalties were ultimately instrumental – designed to achieve something, not valued in themselves.”

⁵⁶ Cotterell, *Born at midnight*, 70-71, 101-106.

⁵⁷ Levine, *Greater Ethiopia*, 123-124.

Clapham identifies two features of Ethiopian political culture and administration fostered by this system: 1) significant lack of interpersonal trust, accompanied by secretiveness, reserve and tendency toward intrigue; and 2) considerable difficulty in building institutions which require standardized protocols independent of personal loyalties, allowing the dispersal and delegation of power. Leaders are expected to be omnipresent and omniscient, able to intervene in the smallest detail of organizational life and be personally involved in the implementation of any innovation.⁵⁸

6. Alemayehu Mekonnen: Cultural leadership values and patterns

Exploring the impact of culture change on Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian leaders in Addis Ababa, Alemayehu Mekonnen identifies leadership values in traditional Ethiopian culture, including supernatural authorization of leaders, heredity, orality, bravery, patriarchy and domination. Within families, husbands have ultimate authority, although wives may effectively influence the household. Alemayehu characterizes pre-revolutionary Ethiopian culture as authoritarian and hierarchical, with families, schools and churches emphasizing unconditional obedience and respect for tradition. Amhara, Tigrean and Oromo cultures discouraged innovation, viewing it not only as ineffective, but immoral. Parents would punish children for asking difficult questions about life or society, or confronting parental mistakes. Western education, however, introduced children to a radically different value system prioritizing independence over dependence, self-expression over silence, and challenge of authority over deference. Alemayehu argues that young leaders in the emerging Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian movement of the 1960s had been shaped by traditional cultural norms, but were part of a generational cohort whose experience of westernized education led them to question blind obedience to authority and inherited religious teaching.

Haile Selassie's centralization of government in Addis Ababa enabled the rise of a new urban elite focussed on modernizing national infrastructure. Still, Alemayehu argues that the emperor prioritized loyalty above competence and punished dissent. As the emperor grew increasingly preoccupied with retaining power in the latter years of his rule, he reinforced a leadership culture that became even less responsive to injustice and intensifying critiques from Ethiopian students and educated military officers.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 21-23.

⁵⁹ Alemayehu Mekonnen, "Effects of Culture Change on Leadership in the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia," Ph.D. dissertation (Fuller Theological Seminary, 1995), 42-74, 83-84; Alemayehu

7. Wondaferahu Adnew Ersulo: Qale Heywet Church leadership values

In his work to strengthen leadership in the Qale Heywet Church, Wondaferahu Adnew Ersulo argues that Ethiopian church leadership patterns are animated by values and principles derived from traditional leadership models from the feudal era, the teachings and practices of pioneering missionaries, and the broader political sphere. Many Ethiopians, he notes, view leadership as synonymous with “command and control,” and associate it with office holders assumed to be superior and dominant. He describes the influence of trait or “great-man” perspectives on leadership in Ethiopian Protestant churches and the broader society, obsession with power, the prevalence of transactional assumptions about leadership and the need for leaders of integrity. There is an assumption that influence originates with the leader at the apex of the hierarchy and flows to those below; the concept of upward influence would be seen as an oxymoron. While recognizing that Western leadership theory requires adaptation to be applied in an Ethiopian context, Wondaferahu commends theories of ethical transformational, servant and appreciative leadership as the basis for strengthening leadership formation in the church.⁶⁰

8. Badeg Bekele: Effective leadership in Ethiopia

Designed to lay the groundwork for an Ethiopian leadership development program, Badeg Bekele’s dissertation explores how prominent Ethiopian leaders perceive effective leadership, identify ideal traits for leaders, and prioritize needs in leadership training. To give context to his phenomenological study, Badeg explores Ethiopian leadership through various theoretical lenses. Interacting with the critique of Irby, Brown, Duffy and Trautman that leadership theories primarily reflect a male perspective, Badeg identifies an Ethiopian cultural bias that understands leadership as a male domain. He finds that contemporary church leaders see servant leadership as their highest training priority. Leaders in business and non-governmental organizations focus on vision and change leadership. Badeg commends both servant and transformational leadership as helpful paradigms for strengthening leadership in Ethiopia.⁶¹

Mekonnen, “Culture Change in Ethiopia: An Evangelical Perspective” (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 33-58, 63-65.

⁶⁰ Wondaferahu Adnew Ersulo, “Bridging the Gap: Towards Developing Appropriate Leadership Approach for the Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church” (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009), 54-56, 62-72, 116-117. *Kale Heywet* is an alternate English transliteration to *Qale Heywet*.

⁶¹ Badeg Bekele, “Effective Leadership in Ethiopia: Perceived Needs of Prominent Ethiopian Leaders to Demonstrate Effective Leadership in the Country and the Formation of a Relevant Leadership Program to Meet the Need” (Ed.D. diss., Azusa Pacific University, 2005); B. J. Irby et al., “The Synergistic Leadership Theory,” *Journal of Educational Administration*, 40:4/5:304-322.

9. Counterpoint: Ethiopian women in leadership

Although women have been largely neglected in Ethiopian social and historical studies, Belete Bizune identifies works focusing on women who exercised leadership in their patriarchal cultural context:

- a) Chris Prouty Rosenfeld explores the influential role of eight elite women in highland Ethiopian politics during the *Zemene Mesafint* (1769–1855);
- b) Donald Crummey uses fragmentary evidence from church documents to show that elite women had rights to land and offices accompanying landholding during the Gonderine era (1632–1721), but needed to play a "subordinate role" in legal transactions;
- c) Based on accounts of foreign travelers and diplomats, Prouty Rosenfeld's biography of Empress Taytu, consort of Menelik II, addresses the empress's role as a diplomat and a politician;
- d) References to women in battle from Aksumite times to the Italian-Ethiopian War of 1935–36 to regional separatist movements, particularly in the Eritrean People's Liberation Movement (EPLF), the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF);
- e) Judith Olmstead offers a fascinating anthropological account of a woman who, after her husband's death, assumed the position of *balabat*, a local political leader, mediating disputes among villagers and navigating relationships between her Gamo Highlands community and the imperial government;
- f) Anthropological works exploring women's roles in economic initiatives;
- g) Fragmentary references to women's roles in spirit possession cults, and in the spread of evangelical Christianity.⁶²

While confirming the dominance of men in Ethiopian leadership culture, these works highlight the leadership contributions of women within a patriarchal context.

10. Hassan Yemer: Transforming governance in Ethiopia

Hassan Yemer explores the viability of revolutionizing Ethiopian organizational and national governance through the application of transformational leadership theory. Characterizing his nation's leadership culture as authoritarian, inflexible, myopic, averse to risk and resistant to change, Yemer advocates transformational leadership focused on building collective strength in organizations. Recognizing that Western theory cannot be applied uncritically in Ethiopia, Yemer is not discouraged by cultural but

⁶² Belete Bizuneh, "Women in Ethiopian History: A Bibliographic Review," *Northeast African Studies*, 8, no. 3 (2001): 7–32; citing Chris Prouty Rosenfeld, "Eight Ethiopian Women of the *Zemene Mesafint* (c. 1769–1855)," *Northeast African Studies* 1, no. 2 (1979): 63–85; Donald Crummey, "Women, Property, and Litigation among the Bagemder Amhara, 1750s to 1850s," in *African Women and the Law: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Margaret Jean Hay and Marcia Wright (Boston: Boston University, 1982); Donald Crummey, "Family and Property amongst the Amhara Nobility," *Journal of African History* 24 (1983): 207–20; Chris Prouty Rosenfeld, *Empress Taytu and Menelek II: Ethiopia 1883–1910* (Trenton, N.J.: The Red Sea Press, 1986); Judith Olmstead, *Woman Between Two Worlds: Portrait of an Ethiopian Rural Leader* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

political barriers toward a change in leadership philosophy. He concludes that transformational leadership efforts will be stifled as long as a dictatorial national government uses its power over public and private sectors to resist such change.⁶³

11. Studies in Ethiopian leadership: A summary of themes

Despite the variety of culturally unique forms and contexts for leadership in Ethiopia, clear themes run through the literature: a) an emphasis on hierarchical authority, deference and unquestioning obedience toward leaders; b) an understanding of power as a precious commodity one must defend; c) a predisposition toward seeing leadership as a male domain; d) the valuing of loyalty to the leader above organizational effectiveness; e) greater appreciation for tradition than innovation; and f) respect for personal bravery and success. Meserete Kristos Church leaders would challenge many of these leadership assumptions and norms – particularly during persecution by the revolutionary government.

D. Meserete Kristos Church beginnings, leadership formation, and Holy Spirit renewal

How did the Meserete Kristos Church emerge from the work of the Mennonite Mission in Ethiopia? In what contexts were indigenous leaders called and formed? How did the Meserete Kristos Church relate to the broader evangelical movement in Ethiopia and interact with the emergent charismatic movement on the eve of the socialist revolution?

1. The Mennonite Mission in Ethiopia

Mennonite missionaries arrived in Ethiopia amid reconstruction following the Italian occupation, initially under the auspices of the Mennonite Relief Committee (Elkhart, Indiana) and Mennonite Central Committee (Akron, Pennsylvania). Bringing clothing, food and medicine in 1945, they negotiated a five-year contract with the government the following year, enabling them to open a hospital in Nazareth, a strategic town of 12,000 east of Addis Ababa. Short term mission workers served as doctors, nurses and administrators who treated patients and trained health assistants (known as dressers) to work in hospitals and rural clinics. In 1948, Mennonite missionaries also began teaching in government schools. By 1950, responsibility for the Mennonite mission in Ethiopia was transferred to the Eastern Mennonite Board of

⁶³ Hassan Yemer, “Applicability of Transformational Leadership Models in the Ethiopian Context” (Ph.D. diss., Walden University, 2009).

Missions (EMM). The following year, the government authorized the mission to expand its work beyond relief and medical services to include education and evangelism in areas designated “open” by the 1944 Missions Decree. In the predominantly Muslim Hararge province in Eastern Ethiopia, EMM established clinics, elementary schools, and a hospital in Deder, Bedeno and Dire Dawa. At the invitation of Haile Selassie, the mission opened a School for the Blind in Addis Ababa. Later it assumed responsibilities from SIM for Christian bookstores in the capital, Nazareth and Dire Dawa.⁶⁴

2. The birth of a church

Through the 1950s, worship and Sunday School were held at the five established mission locations: the School for the Blind in Addis Ababa, the Nazareth hospital compound, a rented home in Dire Dawa, and school buildings at Deder and Bedeno. Early in the decade, a small number of Ethiopians began meeting with missionaries in their Sunday worship services in Nazareth. Many were employees of the hospital or worked as guards, kitchen workers or assistants to the missionaries. The number increased as staff from other evangelical backgrounds joined them. As Ethiopians made professions of faith in Jesus Christ, however, it raised questions about baptism. To baptize someone of EOTC background in the “closed” area of Nazareth would violate the 1944 Missions Decree. On June 16, 1951, nine baptismal candidates travelled to Addis Ababa. The missionaries reasoned that the baptism would be legal in the “open” area of the capital. Joined by a tenth new believer, they were the first to be baptized by Mennonite missionaries in Ethiopia. The Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) marks this event as its beginning. Within a few days, however, a report of the baptism reached the governor of Nazareth, then the emperor, who expressed his personal disappointment. The missionaries pledged never to do this again. In the future, Ethiopian lay leaders would secretly baptize new believers in the presence of a few trusted witnesses meeting in a home at night. Although missionaries initially helped with instruction for baptism, they did not attend the events themselves. Ethiopian believers were thus empowered to baptize from the beginning.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Alemu Checole, assisted by Samuel Asefa, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” in *Anabaptist Songs in African Hearts*, ed. John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder: 191-253 (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2006), 207-208; Nathan Hege, *Beyond our Prayers: Anabaptist Church Growth in Ethiopia, 1948-1998* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 38-87; Dorothy Smoker, and Chester L. Wenger, *God Led us to Ethiopia* (Salunga, PA: Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, 1956), 26-34; Yeshitela Mengistu, “The Story of the Meserete Kristos Church,” Student paper (Mekane Yesus Seminary, 1983), 1-5.

⁶⁵ Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 208; Jörg Haustein, *Writing Religious History: The Historiography of Ethiopian Pentecostalism* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 13; Chester Wenger, Phone interview by author, June 29, 2008; Yeshitela Mengistu, “The Story of the Meserete Kristos Church,” 6-8; Hege,

3. Leadership formation in an emergent church

The Mennonite mission opened a Dresser Bible School in Nazareth in 1952 with permission to teach the Bible alongside medical courses. Educator Chester Wenger described the purpose of the school in EMM's *Missionary Messenger* that year:

1) to be sure about the salvation of each student; 2) to help students know the love of Christ as expressed in Christian brotherhood; 3) to establish students in the Word of God; 4) to help Ethiopia in its need of dressers; 5) to provide students with means for an honest livelihood; 6) to supply dressers to assist in opening new areas to Christian witness; and 7) to awaken evangelistic conviction in the students.⁶⁶

In response to biblical teaching, many students embraced the gospel. Missionaries encouraged them to share their testimonies, preach and engage in evangelistic outreach in various neighborhoods. Their training made it easy to gain good work positions as dressers at the Wonji sugar plantation, where they gave witness to their faith in Jesus Christ, distributed biblical literature, taught and organized small home fellowships among migrant labourers, playing a significant role in spreading evangelical Christian faith in that community. By 1958, the Nazareth congregation had grown to about 150; there were also small congregations of believers at the other four Mennonite mission locations.⁶⁷

Building on their experience with the dresser school, the Mennonite Mission asked Wenger, who had recently completed graduate work in biblically based educational philosophy, to establish and give leadership to a top-tier secondary school, Nazareth Bible Academy. Convinced that “when you are educating, you are training leaders,” Wenger cast a vision for education that would expand students’ potential, providing a foundation for their future development that would not only benefit the church, but Ethiopian society as a whole. In addition, he wanted to impart skills to future church leaders that would enable them to make a living without depending on a salary from the church. The school opened in 1959, quickly gaining a reputation for “one of the best-quality educational programs in the country,” and attracting students from a broad constituency. Most came to personal faith in Jesus.⁶⁸

Beyond our Prayers, 128-131. Missionary Arlene Hege wrote, “It was as thrilling a baptism service as I’ve ever attended – to hear these Ethiopians give their promises. About all of them are in their twenties or late teens; it was very impressive to me.”

⁶⁶ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 74-78.

⁶⁷ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa, Ethiopia, During the Derg, 1974-1991: ‘God Works for Good,’” MA thesis (Eastern Mennonite Seminary, 2002), 14-15; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 131-132; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 109-111, 116; Wenger, Phone interview.

⁶⁸ Wenger, Phone interview; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 78; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 111-112.

In the late 1950s, missionaries and Ethiopian believers began planning for a national church structure and transfer of church leadership to indigenous believers. Ethiopian and North American representatives from the congregations affiliated with the Mennonite Mission gathered in Nazareth in January 1959 to share vision, principles and structure for organizing the church. The Amharic *Meserete Kristos*, meaning “Christ is the foundation,” was suggested and later adopted as the name for the church. Leadership transfer unfolded in three steps:

- a. The first General Church Council, comprised of sixteen Ethiopians and six missionaries, met in September 1962. A Memo of Understanding prepared by EMM provided for three missionaries to serve with five Ethiopians on an Executive Committee. The mission board appointed the chairperson and treasurer; MKC chose the secretary and assistant treasurer.
- b. In 1964, the MKC General Council chose its own officers from the eight-member executive committee (still including three EMM members), calling missionary Chester Wenger to be chairperson; MKC assumed responsibility for the church budget, administration of medical, education, literature and evangelism programs, and assignment of missionary personnel.
- c. In 1965, Ethiopians who had been serving as assistants became officers of the Executive Committee, and missionaries became their assistants. Million Belete became chairperson; Beyene Mulat, secretary. In 1969, EMM discontinued electing members to the MKC Executive Committee.⁶⁹

A similar process of leadership transfer unfolded in local congregations and mission institutions. Wenger observes that in the first five years of the mission, worship gatherings were missionary-led. After that, Ethiopians assumed more leadership in worship and preaching at the invitation of missionaries, “who were looking for those who were spiritually alert.”⁷⁰ Yeshtela Mengistu identifies three stages of leadership transfer at the local level:

- a. Ethiopians were elected for two year terms to serve as leaders in local congregations in cooperation with missionaries. Later, missionaries stepped back from leadership roles unless they were elected by the congregation.
- b. Ethiopians assumed certain leadership positions within mission institutions; for example, the directorship of the Bedeno mission station and school in 1963.
- c. All administrative responsibility in the mission was transferred to Ethiopians.

⁶⁹ Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 209-210, 218; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 134-137; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 116-117; Yeshtela Mengistu, “The Story of the Meserete Kristos Church,” 13-14.

⁷⁰ Wenger, Phone interview.

Yeshitela credits this intentional process of leadership transfer from missionaries to Ethiopians for enabling MKC to gain its own national identity quicker than other more established mission churches.⁷¹

Despite the mission's priority on leadership training and transfer, no Ethiopians were ordained for ministry until 1965. Wenger cites two reasons for relying on lay leadership: 1) an organized church with ordained leaders (particularly bishops) would likely have been more threatening to EOTC leaders; and 2) in other EMM mission contexts positional leadership offices had become status markers provoking conflict and distracting from ministry. Hege identifies another rationale: missionaries feared that ordained leaders would convey the image of a typical EOTC priest focused on religious ritual. Emphasizing the priesthood of all believers, they wanted to avoid creating a clerical hierarchy. Instead, MKC gave people jobs but not titles, adopting a functional approach to leadership. Wenger argues that the relatively "loose" organization of the MKC freed it up for continuing expansion. Even so, by 1965, Wenger and others were convinced that ordination would help the young church "see itself as an authentic body with a mandate from God to evangelize and grow." Million Belete was chosen and ordained. Nathan Hege, already ordained by Lancaster Mennonite Conference in the United States, was also chosen to serve as pastor. Prior to the socialist revolution of 1974 only five others took ordination vows. Many lay members, however, served as evangelists, deacons, elders and pastors; designated lay people performed baptisms. Evangelists (church planters) were paid by the churches, but pastors supported themselves financially with some assistance from free will offerings. Whereas evangelists focused on calling people to faith in Jesus Christ, pastors concentrated on training leaders and administration.⁷²

With Ethiopians filling all roles as officers of the MKC Executive Committee in 1965, the church applied for legal registration with the government, but was refused. Even so, MKC began printing its own

⁷¹ Yeshitela Mengistu, "The Story of the Meserete Kristos Church," 10-11, cites the reflections of former missionary Paul Gingerich, who writes:

We believed it was right to plant a church in the soil of the native land and turn these people over to the guidance of the Holy Spirit to interpret the Gospel for their people within their cultural setting, and not be subject to all the outside cultural baggage that was brought by the missionaries...No other church in Ethiopia, to my knowledge, carried out the change from missionary administration to national leadership in the time span that this church did. I also don't think other churches were blessed with the quality of Ethiopian leadership that Meserete Kristos had.

Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 117, assesses the MKC experience as "one of the best models of smooth transitioning of church leadership from hands of foreign missionaries to an indigenous team." In Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 142, Seyoum Gebretsadik affirms the system of apprenticeship and mentoring that prepared Ethiopians to assume managerial posts and leadership responsibility: "You did not just turn over leadership and leave us to struggle. First you showed the way; then you stood alongside."

⁷² Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 146; Wenger, Phone interview.

letterhead, opened bank accounts and functioned as though it were registered. The Mennonite Mission in Ethiopia remained the legal entity and held title to property and vehicles.⁷³

4. Revival conferences and Holy Spirit renewal

Through the leadership of young Ethiopian Christians with varying degrees of connection to the Mennonite Mission and the Meserete Kristos Church, Nazareth would become a significant hub for spiritual renewal within the national evangelical movement: first as a gathering place for annual revival conferences, and second as one of several fountainheads for charismatic/Pentecostal experience that would transform the church in Ethiopia.

Beginning in 1955, the Nazareth church began to host annual revival conferences on the mission hospital compound, led by gifted youth leaders who not only organized the meetings, but also preached the gospel. Hundreds of people from all parts of Ethiopia came to “sing, study the Bible, and hear sermons of salvation and revival.” For the three-day conference, participants shared meals, slept in the same hall, and developed lifelong friendships. They gave testimony to God’s leading in their lives. Many accepted Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord. Tibebe Eshete argues that these gatherings “created a new associational space needed by Ethiopian youth” while navigating disorienting cultural change in their society. Traditional forms of association – such as *maheber*, *senbete*, and *edir*⁷⁴ – remained adult-oriented; the young and educated had little space to participate. Revival conferences offered opportunities for youth to develop leadership skills. Many would later play key roles in scholarship and evangelism in the country. The conferences also provided an early forum for nurturing Ethiopian hymnody, particularly through a new style of singing introduced by the choir from the Addis Ababa School for the Blind, and advanced during the Pentecostal movement of the 1960s.⁷⁵

In 1962, six students from the Atse Gelawdeos High School in Nazareth approached EMM missionary doctor Rohrer Eshleman for help in learning English; he agreed. With the Gospel of John as a textbook, students were soon discussing the message of Jesus among themselves. Understanding they did not want to identify too closely with the mission due to the stigma of embracing a foreign faith labeled

⁷³ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 137-138, 144-146; Wenger, Phone interview.

⁷⁴ Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 442, 444, 446. *Maheber*: EOTC socio-religious fellowship dedicated to a favored patron saint; *senbete*: a Sunday church social fellowship sharing a meal after worship; *edir*: cooperative society.

⁷⁵ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 139-140; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 118-119.

tsere Mariam (“anti-Mary”), Eschleman assured them that becoming a born again Christian did not require leaving the EOTC Church. The central issue was trusting Jesus Christ rather than rituals for their salvation. Taking that step of faith, students began holding prayer meetings at school and eagerly studied the Bible whenever they could meet. As numbers grew, group members were increasingly targets of ridicule and hostility, and were no longer allowed to meet at school. In response, Mennonite missionaries paid monthly costs for renting a house for them to host group meetings. In the relative freedom of this space, students gathered often for prayer, Bible study and fellowship, adopting the name *yäsämay bərhan* – “Heavenly Sunshine” – from the title of a favorite song. Learning about the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, by the end of 1964 the group began to fast and pray – fervently, three times daily – for the Spirit of God to baptize them, impart gifts and enable them with “divine power to reach out to others with the message of salvation.” They began to pray simultaneously. In their quest for a more direct, personal and powerful experience of God, some felt the “touch of the power of God,” leading them to speak in languages they did not understand, accompanied by ecstatic joy. *Yäsämay bərhan* members became more fervent in faith and courageous in their witness to Christ. Worship was marked by new freedom, accompanied by shouting, loud prayers, singing, prophecy, deliverance from evil spirits and healing from sickness.⁷⁶

Many in the surrounding community – especially Orthodox Christian youth – were offended by the demonstrative faith of *yäsämay bərhan* and pressured them to stop. Even so, the movement continued to attract students from EOTC background. Although Mennonite missionaries and MKC leaders found some charismatic expressions strange, they were convinced these young Christians were sincere in their faith and tried to support them. When Heavenly Sunshine youth were arrested for “unorthodox” gatherings, MKC members advocated for their release at the prison and served as their guarantors. One MKC leader and youth mentor, Gebre Sellassie Habtamu, occasionally taught the Bible in *yäsämay bərhan* meetings. When the youth prayed for him, he fell to the floor and began praying in tongues. In 1965, the group held a spiritual life conference in a tent on the Nazareth hospital grounds. They rented a cinema for the conference

⁷⁶ Abera Ertiro, “History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth from 1951-2003,” BA senior paper (Meserete Kristos College, 2003), 16-19; Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 220-221; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 147-151; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 119-120; Yeshitela Mengistu, “The Story of the Meserete Kristos Church,” 16.

the following year, but police broke up the meeting at the request of EOTC leaders. Yäsämay bərhan finished the conference in the hospital chapel, with permission from the MKC elders.⁷⁷

In his historiography of Ethiopian Pentecostalism, Jörg Haustein identifies multiple points of origin for the national charismatic movement that would significantly shape all evangelical churches in Ethiopia: 1) the 1963 visit of Kenyan evangelist Chacha Omahe to the Awasa Bible Conference and the Finnish mission in Addis Ababa; 2) the Nazareth yäsämay bərhan movement; 3) a revival among trainees at the Teacher Training Institute in Harar in 1964/65; 4) the formation of a Pentecostal gathering of university students in Addis Ababa in 1965; and 5) the separation of some Ethiopian believers from the Merkato Finnish mission. The various revival streams converged in Addis Ababa as participants from local movements (including Nazareth) came together with the university student gathering, resulting in the birth of the Full Gospel Believers' Church (FGBC) – or *Mulu Wengel Church* in 1967.⁷⁸

The Nazareth yäsämay bərhan group was not, however, absorbed into the Mulu Wengel Church, but maintained its own identity within Ethiopian Pentecostalism in the final years of the Haile Selassie regime. The national movement continued to grow, attracting public attention and concern. Following a riot against Pentecostal believers in the town of Debre Zeit in 1967, the press put the spotlight on this “unconventional religious youth group.” The government refused an FGBC application for legal registration, and ordered its Addis Ababa churches to close. Other anti-Pentecostal riots broke out in Bahir Dar, Dire Dawa, and Dessie in 1968. Initially, FGBC believers complied with an order to cease public meetings, shifting instead to private home meetings. After a few months, however, these re-emerged as semi-public gatherings. When the Addis Ababa Mulu Wengel Church was again ordered to close its meeting place in April 1972, it complied for a few months, but then attempted to resurface publicly. In August police arrested 250 Pentecostals and charged them with participating in an illegal gathering. Those who pled guilty were fined up to 200 Ethiopian birr. Others tried in court were sentenced to six months in prison. After an appeal, the final ruling of July 18, 1973 upheld the lower court's verdict, but suspended the

⁷⁷ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 149-155; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 120-121; Girma Haile, “The Brief History of Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church” (BA senior paper, Meserete Kristos College, 2002), 9-12, describes the spread of the charismatic movement to the Dire Dawa MKC through the ministry of Nazareth Bible Academy students, as well as persecution of its participants by the Dire Dawa EOTC community.

⁷⁸ Haustein, *Writing Religious History*, 11-14, 37-129; Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 225-228; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 145-168.

prison sentence in favour of a three-year probation, conditional on suspension of further church meetings. In response, the movement went underground.⁷⁹

Like other Ethiopian Pentecostals, yäsämay bərhan members in Nazareth were targeted for persecution in 1972. They suffered arrests and beatings. Their gatherings were declared illegal. MKC members provided prison visits, food, and other material and spiritual support. While Heavenly Sunshine students appreciated the sympathy and solidarity of the missionaries and MKC, they balked when church leaders suggested that they join MKC, fearing that union would lead to a loss of spiritual vitality.⁸⁰

In 1973, on the eve of the socialist revolution, the Meserete Kristos Church was comprised of eight congregations with 800 members. It operated eleven elementary schools, two junior high schools, one boarding high school, two hospitals, two clinics, two guest houses, a bookstore with several branches and a literature program.⁸¹ That year, yäsämay bərhan leader Solomon Kebede began to encourage revival group members to join MKC, himself becoming a member of the church in Addis Ababa. By 1974, the whole group had followed his lead into MKC. Tibebe Eshete observes that after yäsämay bərhan joined with MKC, more youth in Nazareth were attracted to the church, youth-related church activities expanded, and charismatic renewal began to permeate the church. Students going to Addis Ababa for higher education carried their evangelistic fervor with them and became conduits for the spreading of Pentecostal experience. Members of yäsämay bərhan not only emerged as future leaders of MKC, but of the national evangelical movement, providing strategic guidance to churches during the years of the Derg regime.⁸²

Alemayehu Mekonnen argues that the Pentecostal movement expanded opportunities for participation in church leadership, in particular pushing cultural boundaries about acceptable roles for women. Encouraged to share their spiritual gifts, women embraced expanded roles in ministry, becoming

⁷⁹ Tsega Endalew, "Protestant Mission Activities and Persecutions in Bahār Dar, 1968-1994: A Chronicle," in *Ethiopia and the Missions: Historical and Anthropological Insights*: 210-220; Launhardt, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa*, 156-160; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 169-189; Haustein, *Writing Religious History*, 130-131, 137-187, explores explanations for the independence of yäsämay bərhan from Mulu Wengel, and the persecution of Ethiopian Pentecostals from 1967-1972 in the historical record.

⁸⁰ Abera Ertiro, "History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth," 21; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 154; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 122.

⁸¹ Nathan Hege and Richard D. Thiessen, "Meserete Kristos Church," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, November 2014, http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/meserete_kristos_church.

⁸² Abera Ertiro, "History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth," 21-23; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 154; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 122-123, 188. Lydette S. Assefa "Creating Identity in Opposition: Relations between the Meserete Kristos Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, 1960-1980," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 83, no. 4 (October 2009): 539-570, analyzes conversion narratives from MKC members who joined the church early in its history, including the era of Holy Spirit renewal, to identify common dynamics of identity formation in relation to their Ethiopian Orthodox heritage.

involved in evangelism, teaching, singing and leading group discussions. When men and women met together in public places and homes for fellowship and prayer, however, “they were badly misunderstood and faced severe persecution.”⁸³

Tibebe maintains that the formation and growth of MKC marked a new, dynamic component in the Ethiopian evangelical movement. Whereas earlier missions had largely focused on rural areas, the Mennonite mission concentrated on urban contexts with a strong emphasis on education and a vision for equipping young people for fruitful lives as disciples of Jesus Christ, leaders in the church, and contributing members of society. The young men and women of the MKC were part of an emerging evangelical “elite... highly assertive and enthusiastic about their faith,” with expertise and creativity “to organize, network and move across different areas to impact diverse sectors of Ethiopian society.”⁸⁴ As with others in the Pentecostal movement, the testing they received in the latter days of imperial Ethiopia would help prepare them for harsher conditions under the Derg regime.

E. The Ethiopian revolution

After months of escalating crises, famine, strikes and demonstrations, Haile Selassie was deposed as emperor of Ethiopia on September 12, 1974 by the Armed Forces Co-ordinating Committee, popularly known as the Derg (Amharic for “committee”). Following an unsuccessful coup d’état in 1960, a growing number of Ethiopians became disillusioned with the land tenure system, rising prices, corruption, miscarriages of justice, slow economic development and unresponsive government. Ethiopian university students at home and abroad were attracted to Marxism as a means for accelerating modernization, economic reform and social justice. Pressure for political change intensified through 1974 as soldiers, taxi drivers, teachers, students, civil servants and trade unions took part in popular uprisings. On Ethiopian New Year’s Day (September 11, 1974), the documentary *Hidden Hunger* aired on national television. Exposing a devastating famine in the north provinces and the emperor’s failure to effectively respond, the broadcast was interspersed with portrayals of royal luxury. With public sentiment enflamed against him, Haile Selassie was removed from power the following day, marking the end of the Solomonic dynasty.⁸⁵

⁸³ Alemayehu Mekonnen, “Culture Change in Ethiopia: An Evangelical Perspective,” 102.

⁸⁴ Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 123-124.

⁸⁵ The complex dynamics of the Ethiopian revolution have been examined from multiple perspectives. For political histories tracing the roots of the revolution to weaknesses in Haile Selassie’s regime, see Andargachew

Immediately repealing the 1955 constitution and dissolving parliament, the revolutionary government was centred in a 120 member Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), also known as the Derg. A diverse group from various military factions, the Derg initially expressed only the ideologically vague philosophy: “Ethiopia First, without any bloodshed.” The first prime minister elected by the Derg, General Aman Andom, favoured establishing a democratic republic through a referendum, due process for political prisoners, a conciliatory approach to Eritrea and freeing members of the royal family. Frustrated by those who opposed him, he joined a conspiracy of anti-Derg soldiers and aristocrats. When his plans were discovered via a wiretapped telephone conversation, he and fifty-nine prominent representatives of the old regime were executed on November 22, 1974. Although the next chairman and head of state was Tafari Banti, real power rested with two vice-chairmen: Mengistu Haile Mariam and Atnafu Abata. Soon after, the Derg labelled the ideology of the revolution “Ethiopian Socialism.” On December 20, 1974, they clarified this as the embrace of “scientific socialism,” established through a one-party state, public ownership of the whole economy, and collective agriculture. They also called for national unity and equality for all ethnic, religious, and cultural groups.⁸⁶

Recognizing the potential for student political fervour in Addis Ababa to destabilize the new regime, the PMAC closed Addis Ababa University and high schools on December 21, 1974 to mobilize students in grade 11 and above as change agents in the countryside. In this “Development through Cooperation, Enlightenment and Work Campaign,” popularly known as *zemecha*,⁸⁷ about fifty thousand secondary school students and six thousand university students and teachers scattered throughout rural Ethiopia to teach literacy, improve hygiene, and build clinics, schools, latrines and wells with local people.

Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution, 1974-1987: A Transformation from an Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*; Mulatu Wubneh and Yohannis Abate, *Ethiopia: Transition and Development*; Paulos Milkias, *Haile Selassie, Western Education and Political Revolution in Ethiopia* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2006), focuses on the power of ideas in effecting political change; Teferra Haile-Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution, 1974-1991: From a Monarchical Autocracy to a Military Oligarchy* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1997) offers an ideological and political history from the perspective of a revolutionary participant; Donald L. Donham, *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), explores the role of modernist philosophy in shaping Ethiopia’s Marxist experiment, its appropriation of Orthodox Christian culture and rejection of evangelical Christianity, arguing that education provided by Christian missionaries equipped citizens in rural Maale to break with traditional customs and oppose unjust landholding practices; Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*, 161-227 maintains that Ethiopian nationalism and commitment to the nation-state were the revolution’s driving forces.

⁸⁶ Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 71-81; Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, 43-46; Donham, *Marxist Modern*, 21-27; Henze, *Layers of Time*, 284-290; Marcus, *A history of Ethiopia*, 189-190; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 268-270; Teferra Haile-Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 127-155; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 203-205.

⁸⁷ *Zemecha* is the Amharic word for “campaign,” retaining military overtones; also transliterated as *zāmācā*.

Although many students were initially suspicious of the military government's motives, support for *zemecha* grew as its revolutionary programme unfolded in 1975. All banks and insurance companies were nationalized on January 1, followed by major commercial and industrial enterprises (February 3), rural land (March 4), and urban land (July 26). Students became essential agents of the new political order, charged with organizing farmers into peasant organizations and town dwellers into urban administrative neighbourhood councils known as *kebeles*. These institutions – each with elected leaders – would form basic units of a bureaucratic hierarchy extending from local communities to the national level. After secondary schools and the universities were reopened in the autumn of 1976, future high school graduates were required to teach a three-month literacy course as a condition for entering university.⁸⁸

Despite the early success of the Derg, by summer 1975 it was under growing pressure from rival Marxist factions, particularly the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (MEISON). Opposed to military government on principle, the EPRP demanded an immediate return to civilian rule. In contrast, MEISON embraced the military as an ally for advancing socialism in the early stages of revolution and sought a critical alliance with the Derg, believing they could “educate” and eventually take over the regime. Closely collaborating with the Derg, MEISON launched the National Democratic Revolution Programme of Ethiopia (NDRPE) in April 1976, with the goal of establishing a Russian-style Marxist-Leninist workers' party and further advancing “scientific socialism” in Ethiopia. Clapham notes that within the Derg, this marked a seizure of political initiative by Mengistu at the expense of other factions and assured the Soviet Union that the revolution was following a Marxist path. Adopting the rhetoric of class struggle, the programme identified enemies of the revolution – including landed aristocrats, bourgeois classes and imperialism – and plans for eliminating them.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 85-122; Randi Rønning Balsvik, “Addis Ababa University in the Shadow of the Derg, 1974-1991,” in *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, 259-272, ed. Svein Ege et al. (Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2009); Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, 45-51; Donham, *Marxist Modern*, 27-33; Henze, *Layers of Time*, 290-291; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 190-193; Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*, 169-175; Mulatu Wubneh and Yohannis Abate, *Ethiopia: Transition and Development*, 90-107; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 270-271; Teferra Haile-Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 149-165.

⁸⁹ Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 123-155, gives a detailed overview and analysis of political factions during this time; also Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, 51-55; Henze, *Layers of Time*, 292-294; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 193-194; Mulatu Wubneh and Yohannis Abate, *Ethiopia: Transition and Development*, 51-56; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 270-271; Teferra Haile-Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 171-179.

In September 1976, the EPRP began a campaign of urban terrorism, targeting MEISON leaders, who then organized their own death squads to counter the EPRP. Resenting Mengistu's dominance in the Derg, an internal coalition voted to reduce his executive powers in December 1976, enhancing the position of Tafari Banti as chairman, head of state and commander in chief. On February 3, 1977 supporters of Mengistu arrested and executed Tafari Banti with five of his closest allies, accusing them of conspiring with the EPRP to oust him and undermine MEISON. Declared chairman and head of state by the Derg on February 12, Mengistu was determined to purge opposition to his rule within PMAC and MEISON, as well as crush the EPRP. In the unprecedented brutality and bloodshed which followed – known as the Red Terror – thousands of young men and women were arrested, tortured and/or killed, often by local *kebele* defense squads. Corpses were often piled on strategic street corners, slogans pinned to their bodies as warnings to passersby. The remains were later gathered and buried in mass graves on the outskirts of cities. Estimates of those killed by the Derg during the Red Terror of 1977-1978 range from 150,000 to 500,000.⁹⁰

The trauma of the Red Terror virtually eliminated open civilian opposition to the Derg. By mid-1977, the EPRP was largely wiped out in urban areas; surviving members regrouped in the north in an attempt to launch a rural guerilla campaign against the regime. This was not the end of urban terror, however. Clapham observes that the focus of the violence merely shifted as the Derg, driven by Mengistu, tried to purge itself of MEISON influence. In the final months of the Red Terror, it became difficult to discern who was being killed by whom: “assassinations routinely ascribed to the EPRP may well have been the work of rival factions of MEISON, or even of the Derg seeking to rid itself of untrustworthy officials while blaming its opponents.”⁹¹

Gebru Tareke argues that from 1975 to 1991, Ethiopians fought two parallel revolutions which clashed despite sharing similar ideological goals. The radical soldiers of the Derg led a top-down revolution using state resources and coercion. Insurgent intellectuals, based in the countryside, led a second revolution

⁹⁰ Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 205-226; Balsvik, “Addis Ababa University in the Shadow of the Derg,” 264-265; Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, 56-57; Henze, *Layers of Time*, 294-295; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 195-196; Mulatu Wubneh and Yohannis Abate, *Ethiopia: Transition and Development*, 56-59; Teferra Haile-Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 184-204. For a recent assessment of scholarship on the Ethiopian Red Terror, see Anne Louis Mahoney, ed. *Documenting the Red Terror: Bearing Witness to Ethiopia's Lost Generation* (Ottawa: Ethiopian Red Terror Documentation and Research Center, 2012). From a political science perspective, Edward Kissi, *Revolution and Genocide in Ethiopia and Cambodia* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), describes the Ethiopian experience as *political massacre* rather than *genocide*, arguing that the Derg targeted perceived political opponents across religious and ethnic lines.

⁹¹ Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, 56-57; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 196; Teferra Haile-Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 207-209.

through mass mobilization and political organization. In the first decade of the Derg regime, the government faced twenty opposition groups within and outside the country, fifteen in armed combat. Increasingly relying on Soviet and Cuban military backing, Mengistu fought back a Somali invasion in the Ogaden region from July 1977 to March 1978, an effort which rallied significant nationalist support to him and his government. This in turn helped sustain the PMAC's struggle against internal opposition, especially Eritrean secessionists and Tigrayan guerilla fighters, until the fall of his regime in 1991.⁹²

Attempting to conform the Ethiopian revolution to Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy – and with support from the Soviet Union – in December 1979 Mengistu Haile Mariam announced the creation of the *Commission for Organizing the Party of the Workers of Ethiopia* (COPWE). Tasked with spreading Marxist-Leninist ideology and building a vanguard communist party in preparation for establishing a new People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the COPWE had full government support. Paul Henze characterizes it as “little more than a truncated Derg.” When the *Workers' Party of Ethiopia* (WPE) was finally launched in September 1984, Mengistu emerged as General Secretary of the Party, retaining his position as chairman of the Derg and absolute head of government.⁹³

Preoccupation with political opposition and civil war diverted resources from social and economic priorities. Overall, the Derg years were economically disastrous. Attempting to rehabilitate an economy “shattered by war and misguided economic policies,”⁹⁴ the PMAC launched a centrally controlled development program, designing and executing five annual plans from 1979-1984. Despite encouraging economic results in the first years of the program, the 1983-1985 Ethiopian famine threatened one-sixth of the population with starvation, devastated the nation and called global attention to failures in the government's response to the crisis. Indeed, Mengistu blocked international food aid from rebel-held

⁹² Gebru Tareke, *The Ethiopian Revolution: War in the Horn of Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, 57-64; Henze, *Layers of Time*, 300-307; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 196-201; Mulatu Wubneh and Yohannis Abate, *Ethiopia: Transition and Development*, 68-76; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 271-274; Teferra Haile-Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 204-218; Reid, *Frontiers of Violence in North-east Africa*, 173-207.

⁹³ Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 227-264; Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, 70-92; Henze, *Layers of Time*, 306; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 202-204; Markakis, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*, 177-178; Mulatu Wubneh and Yohannis Abate, *Ethiopia: Transition and Development*, 193-194; Teferra Haile-Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 229-73.

⁹⁴ Teferra Haile-Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 218.

territory, attempting to starve opponents into submission. A Derg resettlement campaign to relocate hundreds of thousands of famine victims to other parts of the country added to the humanitarian disaster.⁹⁵

Following the adoption of a new socialist constitution by national referendum in February 1987 and centrally manipulated parliamentary elections in June, the Derg formally transferred government power to a nominally civilian regime in September 1987, inaugurating the *People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia* (PDRE). Most leading members of the new administration were surviving veterans of the Derg. Mengistu Haile Mariam continued as president, his autocracy entrenched in a more overtly Marxist-Leninist political structure.⁹⁶

With the decline of the Soviet Union and collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, leaders of Tigrayan and Eritrean guerrilla movements shifted away from dogmatic socialism. Embracing the advantages of a mixed economy, multi-party democracy and open society, they sought closer ties with the United States and contributions from other opposition groups. In the late 1980s, Mengistu's army suffered a series of demoralizing military defeats. This, combined with economic hardship, led to bitter discontent in the ranks. In May 1989, senior officers attempted a coup d'état, but failed and were arrested. Although this discouraged future mutinies, the army fought against advancing rebels with reduced conviction; desertion rates and surrender among conscripted soldiers increased. Desperate to shore up domestic support, Mengistu announced a program of extensive reform to the Ethiopian parliament in March 1990, promising the introduction of a mixed economy, greater personal freedom and replacing the *Workers' Party of Ethiopia* with a more democratic representative body. Although the public welcomed the reforms, optimism eroded two weeks later when the country learned that twelve generals involved in the previous year's coup attempt had already been shot at Mengistu's order.⁹⁷

In early 1989, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM) united to form the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO) joined later that year. With much of Tigray already

⁹⁵ Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 347-351; Henze, *Layers of Time*, 306--311; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 202-210; Mulatu Wubneh and Yohannis Abate, *Ethiopia: Transition and Development*, 107-125; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 274-275; Teferra Haile-Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 218-221.

⁹⁶ Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 265-298; Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, 92-100; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 210-211; Teferra Haile-Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 274-284.

⁹⁷ Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 344-361; Henze, *Layers of Time*, 312-318; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 211-215; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 276; Teferra Haile-Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 284-300.

under TPLF control, in January 1991 the combined forces of the EPRDF launched a campaign to free the northern Amhara regions, and then advanced south toward Addis Ababa. Appointing Tesfaye Gebre Kidan as acting President, Mengistu Haile Mariam fled the country with his family on May 21, 1991. Two days later, the nearly 200,000-strong Derg army in the north surrendered in Asmara. Government military positions in the east and south also collapsed. On May 28, EPRDF forces entered Addis Ababa with minimal resistance and by June 3 controlled the whole country, except for Eritrea, which was held by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). The era of Ethiopian communism had ended.⁹⁸

F. The experience of churches and leaders under the Derg

Many Ethiopians greeted the revolution with hope for a new era of social justice and religious freedom. Instead, the government's embrace of Marxist ideology, consolidation of political power around Mengistu Haile Mariam, anxiety regarding evangelical Christianity as a rival to socialism, and ability to exploit traditional religious prejudice eventually led to widespread persecution. Exploring new avenues for collaboration and mutual support, evangelical churches continued to grow as they adapted their ministries for the changing context. The responses of individual church leaders to the communist challenge ranged from fear, paralysis, accommodation and compromise, to critical engagement, courage and bold witness to Jesus Christ. The experience of the Meserete Kristos Church under the Derg can be roughly divided into two parts: a) a period of cautious, open ministry during the seven and a half years from the revolution to the closure of the church on January 24, 1982, and b) the underground years, from church closure to the fall of Mengistu Haile Mariam's regime in 1991.

1. Freedom of religion: Rhetoric and reality

Amid the unrest of early 1974, one hundred thousand Muslims – with some Christian support – joined in a demonstration in Addis Ababa on April 20, calling for the separation of church and state, and religious equality for all Ethiopians. This was granted in the August 1974 draft constitution, winning the Derg significant goodwill from those whose faith had left them marginalized under Haile Selassie's regime. The Full Gospel Believers' Church (FCBC), or Mulu Wengel, which spent the final two years of the

⁹⁸ Henze, *Layers of Time*, 313, 320-330; Marcus, *A History of Ethiopia*, 216-217; Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians*, 276-277; Teferra Haile-Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 305-328.

imperial government underground, convened a meeting that month to re-establish their national church network. By January 1975, they had begun meeting for public worship in Addis Ababa.⁹⁹

As Islam gained formal equality with Orthodox Christianity,¹⁰⁰ the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church lost its special status in relation to the state. The land reforms of 1975 greatly reduced the income of the EOTC. Although the government gave token compensation through a small annual allowance to the church, nearly 200,000 priests and church workers were left without financial support. Objecting to the new policy, EOTC patriarch Abune Tewoflos refused to collaborate with the Derg. He was deposed and arrested in February 1976, executed in July 1979. His replacement, Tekle Heymanot II, was seen as a devout but generally compliant monk. Through a government-appointed administrator, an oversight committee to purge the EOTC of unwanted elements, and manipulation of clergy by Derg agents, the regime tried to co-opt and weaken the church without targeting its members for persecution. Still, between 1977 and 1982, a number of EOTC leaders were jailed, forced to retire or executed for speaking against the regime.¹⁰¹

Because mission churches – both Roman Catholic and evangelical – were on the cultural periphery, many of their members were optimistic about political change. Through popular music, slogans, public statements, and newspaper commentary, revolutionary rhetoric initially stressed the compatibility between Christianity and socialism. Even so, the Derg soon began an aggressive campaign to promote atheism and combat religious worldviews: prohibiting religious education and church-run private schools in September 1975, sending cadres abroad (primarily to the Soviet Union) for ideological training, instituting

⁹⁹ Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 49; Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 112; Shenk, "Church and State in Ethiopia," 207; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 264-265, 418, n. 2; Jörg Haustein, "Navigating Political Revolutions: Ethiopia's Churches During and After the Mengistu Regime," in *Falling Walls: The Year 1989/90 as a Turning Point in the History of World Christianity*, ed. by Klaus Koschorke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009): 117-136; and *Writing Religious History*, 197-198. Religious freedom was affirmed in the April 1976 National Democratic Revolution Programme of Ethiopia (NDRPE). The "Revised Constitution," adopted January 1987, reaffirmed the legal separation of church and state, and guaranteed freedom of conscience and religion, with the caveat that "religion was not to be exercised in a manner contrary to the interests of the state and revolution, public morality or freedom of other citizens." This gave legal room for the repression of evangelical Christians, deemed to be enemies of the revolution;

¹⁰⁰ Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 112-114. Despite the declaration of three Muslim ceremonial days as national holidays, and promises to end discrimination against Muslims in the civil service and armed forces, many were disappointed to learn that Marxist ideology would give no place for teaching Islam in schools, fewer than one percent of the restructured civil service would be Muslim, the Derg would blame Muslim traders for inflationary price on commodities, and use violence to intimidate Muslim religious leaders to comply with government demands.

¹⁰¹ Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, 155; Girma Bekele, *The In-Between People*, 340-341; Haustein, *Writing Religious History*, 189-192; Shenk, "Church and State in Ethiopia," 207-217; Teferra Haile-Selassie, *The Ethiopian Revolution*, 183-184; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 209-211; Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 111-112, 166-168, observes that with the consecration of 13 new bishops in January 1979, conflict between the government and the EOTC not only waned, but the EOTC became "a vehicle of the regime."

mandatory Marxist-Leninist “discussion forums” for indoctrinating employees in April 1976, and establishing the *Yekatit 66* Political School for cadres and government officials, supplemented by smaller regional training centres to equip participants to spread communist philosophy and atheism. Kebele (urban dwellers) and gebere (rural dwellers) associations not only functioned as local government administrative units but centres for propagating Marxism through trained cadres. Tibebe Eshete observes that

Qebele-based obligatory indoctrination sessions were deliberately scheduled on Sunday mornings to compete with Christian religious observances. The battle for winning souls, especially of the youth, was conducted on all fronts, through distractive activities like youth festivals and rallies called *Kinet* (literally, revolutionary art and music shows) where the youth were forced to participate in songs and dramas that glamorized the revolution.¹⁰²

Evangelical Christians responded to the revolution in diverse ways; many adopted a stance of constructive, critical engagement in the early years; others focused on the ideological incompatibility between Marxism and Christianity. Øyvind Eide explores the experience of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) in this time through the leadership of its president and general secretary. Although church president Emmanuel Abraham was held political prisoner from April 1974 to January 1975 because of his role as cabinet minister in the government of Haile Selassie, the EECMY nonetheless sought common ground with the revolutionaries. Long passionate about justice, General Secretary Gudina Tumsa convened a series of seminars on Christianity and socialism involving leaders from EECMY, Ethiopian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Meserete Kristos and Qale Heywet Churches. The seminars (February 1975 – October 1976) expressed support for political and economic change, emphasizing the church’s social responsibility, but clarified that Christianity and socialism were divergent paths. Consistent with this, in a March 1975 pastoral letter the EECMY affirmed the church’s identification with the poor, its desire to share in the pursuit of a more just society and its readiness for the government to take over institutions of education, medicine and development. Even so, it cautioned, “Ideologies cannot be considered as absolute. Complete allegiance is due to God and God alone.”¹⁰³

¹⁰² Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 164-166; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 211-219. *Qebele* is an alternate transliteration for *kebele*.

¹⁰³ Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 58-61, 115-118; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 224-225, 232-235; Haustein, “Navigating Political Revolutions,” 117-136; and *Writing Religious History*, 192-193, 214-219, explores the ambiguity of Pentecostal responses to Ethiopian socialism in the early Derg years.

2. Church collaboration and conflict

Nathan Hege observes that the uncertainties of the time brought evangelical Christians together. In September 1976, about thirteen hundred church leaders, pastors and evangelists from a dozen denominations gathered at Nazareth Bible Academy “to discover their unity and affirm the lordship of Christ.” This birthed the *Council for Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia* (CECE), with leadership from Mekane Yesus, Meserete Kristos and Mulu Wengel churches. The annual Pastor’s Conference, supported by World Vision Ethiopia and interested Christians at Nazareth Bible Academy, became a significant venue for cross-denominational encouragement and relationship-building during the Derg era and beyond.¹⁰⁴

In October 1976, nine denominations, including Ethiopian Orthodox, Catholic, Mekane Yesus, Qale Heywet, Mulu Wengel, and Meserete Kristos churches, formed a broader alliance, the *Council for the Cooperation of Churches in Ethiopia* (CCCE) to serve as “a corporate voice for the faith groups in the evolving political and social reality of Ethiopia.” Tibebe Eshete characterizes the CCCE as an evangelical initiative designed to 1) counter the perception that the church was socially uninvolved, 2) outline parameters for responsible participation in the new political reality, and 3) guard the church against being swallowed up or marginalized by the state. Gudina Tumsa, elected as the first CCCE chairman, worked to build bridges between evangelical, Orthodox and Catholic churches, and help Christian leaders critically engage Marxism with firm grounding in “Scriptures and not socialist ideology.”¹⁰⁵

In June 1977, a government investigation committee noted an increase in the number of people gathering in religious groups, coupled with increasing conflict between government officials and churches in parts of the country. In response, the Derg organized an interreligious seminar in March 1978. EOTC and Muslim leaders used the occasion to express enthusiastic support for the government; Gudina Tumsaa and Roman Catholic Tsagai Kanani criticized the government’s religious policy and the propagandistic tone of the seminar. At one point Tsagai challenged EOTC leader Solomon Gebre-Sellase: “What is at stake is our faith and the freedom of our faith. Our brother from the Orthodox Church revealed an extraordinary flexibility. Before Ge‘ez was the holy language of his church, then came Amharic, and now he gives us the impression that Russian will soon be canonized.”

¹⁰⁴ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 166; Tesfatsion Dallellew, “‘One in the Spirit’ in Ethiopia,” *Missionary Messenger* (September 1977); Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 228-229.

¹⁰⁵ Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 225-227.

Despite dissenting views, official press releases announced the organizers' triumph: "Religious leaders condemn the imperialistic aggression and hail the revolution." The Council for the Cooperation of Christian Churches in Ethiopia did not survive long beyond the interreligious seminar. The EOTC abruptly withdrew, soon followed by the Roman Catholic Church. Since the remaining CCEC churches were all evangelical, the organization folded into the Council for Evangelical Christians in Ethiopia.¹⁰⁶

3. Cultural revolution: Escalating persecution

With open civilian opposition eliminated through the Red Terror and its nationalist credentials bolstered through victory in Ogaden, on September 12, 1978 Mengistu Haile Mariam announced the beginning of an Ethiopian cultural revolution, modeled on the Chinese experience. Tibebe Eshete notes that the media, echoing Mengistu, began to call "for the eradication of backward practices and the rooting out of alien values associated with foreign influences, an allusion to the evangelical faith, to which the tag *Mete* (literally, newcomer) was applied." This was unsurprisingly accompanied by an intensification of persecution against evangelical Christians. Although overtly apolitical, Pentecostalism was perceived to be a threat against the revolution, not only because of its bold witness to Christian faith, but also because it drew from the same broad constituency that Marxists counted on for intellectual leadership: urban, educated young people. Kebele cadres declared, "We shall build our revolution on the graveyard of the Pentecostals." In May 1976, the Addis Ababa Mulu Wengel Church (FGBC) was evicted from their rented facilities in response to a local riot. Securing land elsewhere, they completed a church building project in October 1978. The following September, however, the church was closed and its property confiscated. The church reorganized into house fellowships and remained underground until the fall of the Derg in 1991. Smaller Pentecostal groups faced similar repression. Within and outside the capital, FGBC members were publicly flogged and jailed for refusing to chant revolutionary slogans; a well-known evangelist and musician was imprisoned, with beating and torture, for seven years without trial.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 164-166; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 227-229; Haustein, "Navigating Political Revolutions," 122, observes that in 1983 the provisional party congress recognized Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, and Islam as legitimate religions, but called for the elimination of "foreign churches." Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, 155, concludes that the established, global connections of the Roman Catholic Church helped to protect it; he characterizes its relations with the Derg as "correct but unenthusiastic" on both sides.

¹⁰⁷ Tsega Endalew, "Protestant Mission Activities and Persecutions in Bahār Dar, 1968-1994: A Chronicle," in *Ethiopia and the Missions: Historical and Anthropological Insights*, ed. Verena Böll et al., (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005): 209-220; Haustein, "Navigating Political Revolutions," 130-134; and *Writing Religious History*, 197-211.

The derogatory label *Pente*, initialling applied only to Pentecostal Christians, became politicized to imply imperialist and counterrevolutionary allegiances, and used against all evangelical Christians. Although Mekane Yesus and Qale Heywet church members in south and southwestern Ethiopia had initially welcomed the revolution with enthusiasm, they were now marginalized by the new regime as local authorities branded them Pentes, imprisoned leaders and evangelists, closed churches, burned buildings and publicly ripped Bibles. Former evangelical church members who had embraced Marxist-Leninism were among the harshest in their treatment of those who were once their Christian brothers and sisters.¹⁰⁸

There was a range of response to persecution in evangelical churches. Gudina Tumsaa offered an inspiring model of faithfulness and integrity that led to his martyrdom. Arrested in October 1978, and interrogated about the CCCE during three weeks in prison, when Gudina was asked to represent the government on a goodwill tour to Europe, he refused. Following a second three week imprisonment in June 1979, missionary friends made arrangements for him to leave the country, but Gudina declined, saying, “Here is my church and my congregation. How can I, as a church leader, leave my flock at this moment of trial? I have again and again pleaded with my pastors to stay on.” Quoting 2 Corinthians 5:15, “Christ died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again,” Gudina added, “Never ever will I escape.” He was arrested and executed on July 28, 1979.¹⁰⁹

In response to government propaganda, harassment and intimidation from local cadres, many Ethiopian Christians “temporarily toned down their faith” to avoid trouble. Church leaders became targets of persecution. Some courageously persisted in their ministries despite personal risk; others withdrew from leadership to protect themselves and their families. Øyvind Eide reports that more than half of pastors in

Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 207, 217, 237-238, 263-272, 420, n. 28, notes the media began using the term *Mete* as early as 1975 to refer to evangelicals, branding them “a product of foreign religion, a brainchild of imperialism preaching otherworldliness and a slovenly attitude detrimental to the progress of the country.” Tibebe, and Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 155, connect intensifying persecution of evangelical groups with the formation of the Commission for Organizing the Party of the Workers of Ethiopia (COPWE) in December 1979.

¹⁰⁸ John Cumbers, *Count it All Joy: Testimonies from a Persecuted Church* (Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 1995); and *Living with the Red Terror: Missionary Experiences in Communist Ethiopia* (Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 1996); Donham, *Marxist Modern*, 152-165; Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 168-170, 183-199; Haustein, “Navigating Political Revolutions,” 133; and *Writing Religious History*, 16, 229-247; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 186-187; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 231-251. While the charismatic movement spread through all evangelical churches (with varying degrees of acceptance and resistance) in Ethiopia during the years of the Derg, the accusation of being *Pente* was politically rather than theologically driven, closely associated with being a *Semetawi* (sentimentalist), *Hasabawi* (idealist), and *tsere Abyotegna* (anti-revolutionary), according to Tibebe.

¹⁰⁹ Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 175-179; Haustein, “Navigating Political Revolutions,” 127; and *Writing Religious History*: 193-194; Launhardt, *Evangelicals in Addis Ababa*, 248-250; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 239.

the EEMYC did not continue ministry after their churches were closed. He and Bakke identify personal and systemic factors to account for this. Not only were many paralyzed by fear, EEMYC leadership structures tended to isolate pastors from their congregations; pastors often lived outside the communities in which they served and were viewed as “the synod’s man,” rather than integrated well into local church life. As in other evangelical churches, the absence of pastoral leadership led some EECMY congregations to restructure into house churches led by committed lay members.¹¹⁰

4. The Meserete Kristos Church: Public and underground ministry

As Ethiopia entered the ferment of socialist revolution, the Meserete Kristos Church was already in a process of creative transformation. As a relatively new Christian community integrating energetic members of an indigenous charismatic movement, the church sought to be a faithful witness to Jesus Christ, establishing common identity, practices and mission as Ethiopian evangelical Christians. Life under the Derg regime became a crucible that would profoundly shape the church and its leaders, first as they responded to changing social and political circumstances through careful open public ministry and later as an underground church.

a. Above ground: September 1974 – January 1982

Like other Ethiopian evangelicals, Meserete Kristos Church members initially greeted the revolution with hope that it might lead to greater justice and democracy, but caution about its ideological foundation. Tibebe Eshete observes that, consistent with historic Anabaptist Mennonite approaches to government, MKC leaders wanted to avoid direct political association with the state while identifying with fellow Ethiopians enthusiastic about the regime change. MKC became known for biblically-based teaching that equipped Christians for the challenges of the revolution and its philosophy. An MKC committee was appointed to examine scientific socialism and prepare study resources for the broader church. The team spent 1975 and 1976 summer vacations at Nazareth Bible Academy, writing material covering the basics of Marxism, science and faith, creation and evolution, persecution and faithfulness. Titles included *Let*

¹¹⁰ Bakke, *Christian Ministry: Patterns and Functions*, 220-222, 230-251, 255-258; Eide, *Revolution and Religion in Ethiopia*, 218-226; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 220; F. Peter Cotterell, “The Case of Ethiopia,” in *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert Shenk, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983): 12-23 suggests that the financial independence of Qale Heywet churches meant that its leaders were poorer and buildings rougher than those in the EECMY, but better prepared the church for the challenges of persecution under the Derg (p. 20, n. 16).

Creation Speak, Following Jesus, When Faith is Tested, What Does the Bible Say? and *Christian Youth and Science*. The resources were used at seminars and pastors conferences from 1975-1978 with the goal of “training trainers” from various denominations who would share their learning in local ministry contexts. Participants were sent home with study material and instructions to keep it from the authorities.¹¹¹

Derg officials became alarmed at the growth of the Meserete Kristos Church. Attendance at MKC events in the Bole region of Addis Ababa was particularly conspicuous, with an average of 5000 people – mostly youth – gathering in three worship services every Sunday. Physical healings, described by MKC evangelist Daniel Mekonnen as “love healings,” saw many people freed of cancer, paralysis, blindness and asthma. Meetings drew those who had been involved in political opposition movements as well as Derg administrators and army officers, who were healed of disabilities and injuries suffered in battle. Additional weekend services were added on Saturday to accommodate the crowds. Kebele officials were angered that young people were being drawn to evangelical Christian faith even as attendance at socialist youth meetings was waning. The government increased its surveillance of the church. Its agents attended worship events, observing what was happening and noting who was present. Aware of this, church leaders tried to demonstrate that they had nothing to hide and avoided criticising the Derg.¹¹²

b. Underground: January 1982 – May 1991

By the early 1980s, many were hopeful that MKC had passed the most challenging days of persecution. By 1982, the church had grown to five thousand members in fourteen congregations. Despite ongoing intimidation, arrests and restrictions, the church had continued its public ministry, even securing favourable rulings from local officials to limit persecution. Still, on January 24, 1982, Bole MKC was closed by kebele officials, its property expropriated for use as a primary school. Fisseha Desta, vice chairman of the Derg Council of Ministers and COPWE, had given orders for *kebele* administrations to close all MKC congregations, freeze its bank accounts, seize its property and nationalize institutions still

¹¹¹ Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 231-232; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 161-168, 176-177; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 253-256. In one case kebele officials found copies of documents refuting Marxist ideology in the possession of a young church leader. Although he was imprisoned for four years, he refused to reveal the source of the material.

¹¹² Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 230-232; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 17, 169-171, 203; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 257-259. Although Tibebe claims an average Sunday worship attendance of 5000 for the Bole church, Hege indicates that a total of 1500 people had worshipped there in three services on January 24, 1982, the day the church was closed; he also describes it as “a congregation of two thousand people” – perhaps referring to membership rather than worship attendance.

under its control. The Derg arrested six key MKC leaders, intending to execute them quickly. Delays with the arrests and police distraction with other responsibilities, however, prevented the execution order from being carried out. The process was further complicated by a change in government policy requiring the order of a highly placed government official to authorize an execution. One leader was released after a year; the others spent four and a half years in prison. One of the younger leaders, Kelifa Ali, died soon after due to health complications from ill treatment and torture in prison.¹¹³

Hege observes that the closure of the church and the arrest of key leaders made it clear that commitment to evangelical Christianity would be costly. In response, some left the faith; others withdrew from church activities to minimize risk to themselves and their families; still others renewed their resolve to follow Jesus Christ whatever the cost. Many earnestly asked God to give fresh vision to their church. In various locations, church members were energized by a clear sense of God's direction in response to their prayers and were ready to sacrificially offer their gifts to the mission of the church through active involvement and leadership.¹¹⁴

Unable to meet publicly, MKC leaders led the church through a radical reorganization into home-based cell groups of five to seven members; their weekly gatherings became the primary context for worship, mutual support, discipleship and leadership formation through the remainder of the Derg era. Focussed on personal faithfulness to Jesus Christ, evangelism, strengthening the church and equipping members for ministry, the Meserete Kristos Church continued to grow. By the fall of Mengistu Haile Mariam's government in 1991, MKC included 34,000 baptized members in 53 congregations and 27 church planting centres.¹¹⁵

Tibebe Eshete argues that both the Mulu Wengel Pentecostal Church and the Meserete Kristos Church responded to persecution by reconfiguring their ministries in an ironical "free space" underground.

¹¹³ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 17-29, 182-187; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 259. Despite the political climate, MKC was able to maintain an active partnership with Mennonite Central Committee in regional agricultural development and reforestation projects until the church's closure; see Jacob Schwartzentruber, "A Closely Knit Partnership: Mennonite Central Committee and the Meserete Kristos Church's Attempt at Preventing Famine in Ethiopia from 1974-1982," (BA senior paper, Goshen College, 2011).

¹¹⁴ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 188; Girma Haile, "The Brief History of Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church," 12-18.

¹¹⁵ Abera Ertiro, "History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth," 35-40; Bedru Hussein, "Non-formal Theological Education: The Meserete Kristos Church Experience," in *Theological Education on Five Continents: Anabaptist Perspectives*, ed. Nancy R. Heisey and Daniel S. Schipani, 57-83 (Strasbourg, France: Mennonite World Conference, 1997); Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 61-65; Hege and Thiessen, "Meserete Kristos Church"; Aaron Lehman, "Aster Debossie: Meserete Kristos Churchwoman in Lay Leadership in Ethiopia 1974-1991," (BA senior paper, Goshen College, 2003), 25-26.

Rather than succumbing to external pressure, the commitment of these disciples of Jesus enabled them to be effective agents of the gospel in a hostile environment as they relied on the Holy Spirit to empower them. The MKC also benefited from the hospitality of Mekane Yesus, Qale Heywet and Roman Catholic Christians who often opened their homes and church facilities for MKC leadership meetings, choir practices, weddings and funerals.¹¹⁶

In an overview of Mulu Wengel pastor Bekele Woldekidan's 2002 Amharic church history, *Revival in Ethiopia*, Jörg Haustein notes that the author highlights a number of ways in which Derg rule unintentionally prepared Ethiopia for revival, arguing that 1) it accelerated the independence of mission churches from their supporting agencies, that 2) the underground church provided much better pastoral care, 3) encouraged ecumenism, as well as 4) lay ministry – “all in all establishing a vibrant community of believers that had passed many trials.”¹¹⁷ This certainly fits the experience of the Meserete Kristos Church. It is important to add, however, that its focus on discipleship and mutual care equipped its members to take great risks in pursuit of God's mission with those outside the church, including its persecutors.

G. The Meserete Kristos Church in context: A summary

During the years of the Derg, men and women in the Meserete Kristos Church exercised courageous, purposeful, creative leadership in the midst of significant persecution. In a context where national identity had been closely connected with allegiance to the emperor and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, MKC members were on the religious periphery. Amid the tumult of the socialist revolution, evangelical faith was further marginalized as the state veered toward Marxist-Leninist atheism. Shaped by the Christian witness and leadership formation of Mennonite missionaries who sought to provide a solid foundation for an authentically Ethiopian church and enlivened by an indigenous ecumenical Holy Spirit movement, Meserete Kristos Church leaders were thrust into the uncertainty and chaos of an authoritarian communist regime that wanted to extinguish their church. Although grounded in Ethiopian cultures, MKC members forged new patterns of broadly shared leadership animated by the

¹¹⁶ Alemu Checole, and Ferne Burkhardt, “Lutherans in Ethiopia Put Their Neck on the Line for MKC Members,” *Courier*, 17, no. 1 (2002):14; Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 246-247; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 189, 232; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 18; Girma Haile, “The Brief History of Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church,” 16. For example, in Wonji Gefersa, MKC and Catholic cemeteries were situated side by side. When the Derg closed MKC, the Catholic Church fenced and maintained the entire cemetery at their own expense – and gave outlawed MKC leaders a key to the gate.

¹¹⁷ Haustein, *Writing Religious History*, 211-214.

gospel of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. Like other Ethiopian evangelical Christians, the Meserete Kristos Church was able to participate in a great harvest for the kingdom of God as many found salvation in Christ.

CHAPTER 5 – METHODOLOGY

Previous chapters have pursued the descriptive, interpretive and normative tasks of practical theology by reviewing literature addressing 1) the persecuted church, 2) the cultural and historical context of leadership in the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC), 3) the authentic transformational leadership theory of Robert E. Quinn, and 4) biblical theological perspectives on leadership under persecution. This chapter on research methodology builds on that foundation to advance the empirical task of learning about leadership formation and performance under persecution, focusing on the nature of qualitative research, historical case study, data collection, reflexivity, and data analysis.

A. Qualitative research

Richard Osmer suggests that the *descriptive-empirical* task of practical theology participates in Christ's priestly listening ministry.¹ What method, then, is best suited for listening to the church's experience of leadership under persecution?

From the vantage point of accessibility, it is not surprising that literature addressing the global reality of persecution gives little attention to the practice of leadership in these conditions. Under the pressure of severe persecution, the church survives through discretion, even secrecy, and typically avoids leaving documentary evidence of its activities for persecutors (or researchers!) to discover. Lack of religious, political, journalistic and academic freedom present significant barriers to potential researchers both from within and outside restrictive nations. Even if investigators were able to gain access to persecuted leaders, direct observation of their leadership or conducting interviews with them would normally involve great personal risk for the leaders themselves. How can a researcher gain entry to the experiential world of leaders in the persecuted church? To attempt to quantify this body of experience – which has so far received scant attention and is little understood – would prematurely reduce the available data and unduly limit the scope of this inquiry. A *qualitative research* design is far more appropriate for an exploratory study. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat characterize qualitative research as particular way of *seeing* and *discovering*, citing John McLeod's definition: "Qualitative research is a process of careful,

¹ Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 31-78.

rigorous inquiry into aspects of the social world. It produces formal statements or conceptual frameworks that provide new ways of understanding the world, and therefore comprises knowledge that is practically useful for those who work with issues around learning and adjustment to the pressures and demands of the social world.”²

Alan Bryman traces the growing contributions of qualitative research to the field of leadership studies. Assessing articles published in peer-reviewed journals prior to 2004, Bryman observes two significant changes in the field since the 1970s and 1980s: 1) although once believed to be in crisis, leadership research is now more confident, self-assured and fertile; and 2) marked by greater methodological diversity, particularly due to a surge in qualitative studies of leadership. Qualitative research approaches did not gain a foothold in the field until the late 1980s, Bryman reports. Lowe and Gardner’s review of research published in *The Leadership Quarterly* from 1990-2000 found that about a third of all articles were based on qualitative research. Favoured by a solid minority of leadership researchers, qualitative research has particularly contributed to knowledge of: 1) the role of leadership in the change process, 2) leaders’ use of symbols to achieve organizational ends, 3) dimensions of leadership neglected by other researchers, 4) the significance of context for leader behaviour, 5) the worlds of both senior leaders and those at lower echelons, and 6) the relevance of language for leadership. Bryman observes that qualitative research has also been at the forefront of exploring new areas such as shared leadership, e-leadership, ethical leadership, and environmental leadership.³

Among qualitative methodologies, Bryman finds that interviewing (semi-structured, in-depth, unstructured, and biographical) is the primary means of collecting data. Of 66 journal articles reviewed, twenty-five were based entirely on qualitative interviewing, while fifty-six relied on qualitative interviews for at least some of their data, sometimes supported by documentary evidence and limited observation. To further strengthen leadership research, Bryman encourages 1) more intentional integration of quantitative and qualitative methods, valuing the distinctive contributions of each; and 2) using a wider variety of qualitative data collection methods, particularly observation.⁴

² John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 31.

³ Alan Bryman, “Qualitative Research on Leadership: A Critical but Appreciative Review,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 15, no. 6 (December 2004): 729–769.

⁴ Bryman, “Qualitative Research on Leadership, 750-764.

B. Historical case study

Sharan Merriam describes four primary methods for gathering qualitative data: 1) interviewing, 2) observation, 3) document analysis, and 4) case studies, which may draw on any or all of the other three methods. As a research design, historical case study offers clear advantages for exploring leadership under persecution. Merriam defines a *case study* as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single, bounded unit” or bounded system “such as an individual, program, event, group, intervention, or community.”⁵ The experience of leadership in one relatively small Ethiopian denomination – the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) – under the Derg regime from 1974 to 1991 presents such a bounded case. Research participants from this defined and limited leadership pool not only possess relevant experience leading under persecution but are able to share memories and insights from the relative safety of freer conditions. Merriam identifies three features which distinguish case studies from other qualitative research designs:

1. *Particularistic*, they focus on a specific event, program or phenomenon, seeking a holistic view of the situation. By examining a specific instance, a case study may illuminate a general problem, suggesting possibilities for action in similar situations.
2. *Descriptive*, the end product is a rich “thick” description of the phenomenon under study. A case study may illustrate the complexities of a situation, have the advantage of hindsight yet be relevant in the present, obtain information from multiple sources and present information in a wide variety of ways.
3. *Heuristic*, they lead to the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader’s experience, or confirm what is known. A case study may evaluate, summarize and conclude, thus increasing its potential applicability.

Compared to other research knowledge, learning from case studies tends to be more concrete, contextual, vivid and sensory than abstract – and therefore tends to resonate with readers’ own experience, inviting readers to extend learning through their own interpretation. As readers bring their own experience and understanding to the case, often with a particular reference population in mind, they participate in generalizing knowledge from the case to other contexts and populations. As qualitative research, the findings of this case study of leadership under persecution have potential to shed light on the experience of leadership in other settings, but are not statistically generalizable.⁶

⁵ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 19, 69-149, 193.

⁶ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications*, 29-32; Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 46-49.

Robert Yin offers a twofold technical definition of a *case study*. Beginning with its scope, he describes it as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” A *history* similarly deals with the entangled situation between phenomenon and context but typically with *non-contemporary* events. Second, Yin addresses data collection and analysis strategies, clarifying that case study inquiry “copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.”⁷

As an *historical case study*, this research places the experience of persecuted leaders into context using secondary sources which describe the history and culture of Ethiopia as a nation, its religious landscape, the experience of Christians during the revolutionary period, and understandings and practices of leadership in Ethiopia, as summarized in the fourth chapter of this thesis. The primary data for this research is gathered from interviews with twenty-four men and women who exercised leadership in the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) between the onset of the Ethiopian socialist revolution in 1974 and the collapse of the Derg regime in 1991. This is supplemented by eight written accounts and one video documentary of MKC experience during the same time period, including first person testimony from MKC leaders.⁸ Collection and analysis of primary and secondary source material will be undertaken within the theoretical framework described in the previous chapter.

⁷ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Designs and Methods*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009), 18

⁸ In addition to interview transcripts, this analysis draws on eight documents and one video account of MKC experience during Ethiopia’s Marxist era. Each contains first-person testimony from MKC leaders active between 1974 and 1991 as well as additional description and analysis of the church’s experience during that time:

1. Michael Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*, 29 minutes (Worcester, PA: Gateway Films/Vision Video, 1992), videocassette. This video documentary is an early report of MKC experience in the Derg era, released soon after the church regained its freedom;
2. Nathan Hege, *Beyond our Prayers: Anabaptist Church Growth in Ethiopia, 1948-1998* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998). Written by a retired missionary, this is the only book-length treatment of MKC history in English;
3. Alemu Checole, assisted by Samuel Asefa, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” in *Anabaptist Songs in African Hearts*, ed. John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2006): 191-253; written by an MKC leader active during the revolutionary period;
4. Gemechu Gebre Telila, “History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa, Ethiopia, During the Derg, 1974-1991: ‘God Works for Good,’” (MA thesis, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, 2002); authored by an MKC leader active throughout the Derg era;
5. Abera Ertiro, “History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth from 1951-2003,” (BA senior paper, Meserete Kristos College, 2003);

C. Data collection

Epistemologically, qualitative research is undergirded by the philosophy of *constructivism*: that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds. Although radical constructivists may view reality as *nothing* but a social construction, Swinton and Mowat note that Christian faith assumes that reality is real and is in principle accessible. One's ability to understand and define reality, however, is always filtered through a process of interpretation influenced by social, cultural, spiritual and interpersonal factors. The constructivist perspective directs qualitative researchers to pay attention to the sense people make of their experience and world. Qualitative research thus involves direct concern with experience as it is "lived," "felt," or "undergone." As such, it seeks to understand the phenomenon of interest from the emic perspective of the participants rather than etic view of the researcher.⁹

Among various data collection strategies, interviews are particularly well-suited for learning about behaviour that researchers cannot observe, feelings and interpretations of the world to which they do not have direct access, and past events which are impossible to replicate.¹⁰ Although time-consuming, in-depth personal interviews, supplemented by first-person documentary accounts, are essential for gaining access to the subjective experiential knowledge of leaders under persecution.

Research participants¹¹ were selected based on the recommendations of various people with personal knowledge of MKC leaders who were active and effective in ministry during Ethiopia's revolutionary period. The twenty-four participants include nineteen men and five women who held a diversity of leadership roles in Addis Ababa, Nazareth, Wonji and Middle Awash regions between 1974 and 1991. The pool of interviewees includes cell group leaders, deacons, elders, full-time evangelists,

6. Girma Haile, "The Brief History of Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church," (BA senior paper, Meserete Kristos College, 2002);

7. Kassa Agafari, "A Story of Perseverance in Ethiopia," *Canadian Mennonite*, 3, no. 1 (October 25, 1999): 17-19; a personal account of the author's experience as an MKC leader during the years of the Derg;

8. Aaron Lehman, "Aster Debossie: Meserete Kristos Churchwoman in Lay Leadership in Ethiopia 1974-1991," (BA senior paper, Goshen College, 2003);

9. Jewel Showalter, "'Like Grains of Wheat in the Ground': Ethiopian Mennonites Have Faced Trials and Triumphs in their 50 years," *The Mennonite*, 5, no. 4 (February 19, 2002): 22-23.

⁹ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications*, 6-7; Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 34-37; Marcus W. Dickson et al., "Conceptualizing Leadership across Cultures," *Journal of World Business*, 47, no. 4 (October 2012): 189, highlights the value of building understanding of local culture through an emic approach to the study of leadership in different geographical regions.

¹⁰ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications*, 71-72.

¹¹ This thesis follows Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, 4th ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013), 13, describing those interviewed as *participants* to highlight their active role in reconstructing their experience rather than as *subjects or respondents*, which imply passivity. They are also referred to as *interviewees*.

teachers and administrators of church schools, choir leaders, congregational board members, youth leaders, employees of Christian non-governmental organizations, members of the denominational executive committee, and a leader of a national interdenominational evangelical church association. Some were established as leaders prior to 1974; others stepped into leadership during the Derg era.¹²

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format with open-ended questions inviting reflection on specific dimensions of leadership experience but allowing flexibility to explore ideas that emerged from participants. The Interview Guide, found in Appendix A, begins with two introductory questions exploring the participant's personal background, call to leadership, and the context and nature of his or her leadership role:

- How did you come to be a leader in the Meserete Kristos Church?
- In what ways did you give leadership during the years of the Derg?

The next – and largest – portion of the interview explores the effect of persecution on leaders and their response to it. The first two questions are quite general:

- How did the persecution of the church affect you?
- Can you tell me about a time when you felt you were at your best as a leader?

The following six questions draw on categories from Robert Quinn's concept of the Fundamental State of Leadership, exploring the leader's sense of purpose, internal drive/integrity, other-focus, and external openness, respectively. Three questions connected to other-focus invite leaders to reflect on their

¹² During the years of the Derg nine interviewees were based in Addis Ababa, fourteen in Nazareth, four in Wonji and one in Middle Awash; a few moved or commuted between two communities during that time period. Most carried multiple leadership roles in the church between 1974 and 1991: 1) Seven gave leadership to a cell group; 2) Three were involved in choir leadership; three others were choir members whose ministry included evangelism, prayer and spiritual care; 3) Two served on a congregational board; 4) One as congregational treasurer; 5) Six gave leadership in administration and/or teaching at one or more church schools; 6) Two were part of a team that developed Christian education and apologetics resources for MKC and the broader Ethiopian evangelical movement; 7) Two were employed by Christian nongovernmental organizations; 8) Four served as deacons in their local congregation; 9) Sixteen served as elders; 10) Six were part of MKC's Executive Committee prior to the closure of the church in 1982; 11) Four served on MKC's Evangelism Committee, giving oversight to the denomination during the underground years following the imprisonment of Executive Committee members in 1982; 12) Five served as full-time evangelists, giving pastoral leadership to local congregations and pioneering new congregations through itinerant ministry; 13) Two women were married to full-time evangelists, actively sharing in their ministries; 14) One functioned as a gate watcher, a leadership role in Addis Ababa which involved visiting scattered church members and organizing them into cell groups; 15) One gave leadership to a national interdenominational association of evangelical churches; 16) Three served on their congregation's pastoral care committee; 17) Two were children's Sunday School teachers; and 18) Four were involved in youth leadership. Eleven leaders were also employed in various types of small business or government-owned health, food-processing or manufacturing enterprises. Eight interviewees had been part of another Ethiopian evangelical group before joining MKC. Sixteen came from the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church; of these, four were involved with the *yäsämay bərhan* (Heavenly Sunshine) movement in Nazareth prior to becoming members of MKC. Seventeen research participants joined MKC before the arrival of the revolutionary government in 1974; seven became part of the church during the Derg years.

experience of relationship with leadership team members, the broader in-group of the church as a whole, and members of the persecuting out-group:

- What results did you want to create as a leader? What were you hoping to accomplish?
- I imagine that persecution would put great pressure on you to compromise your faith and values. What kind of pressure did you experience? How did you battle temptation to compromise your faith?
- How did you work as a team in those difficult circumstances?
- How did you help others cope with the pressure of persecution? How did the needs of others challenge you as a leader?
- How did you keep your heart open to people who were persecuting the church?
- What changes did you need to make in your leadership as a result of the persecution? What helped you learn and grow as a leader during that time?

This section of the interview concludes with three general questions about the experience of persecution under leadership. The first is framed as a question about others in order to uncover observations about leadership which interviewees may more easily see or acknowledge when expressed by others than in their own experience, whether because of modesty or clearer perspective. The following two questions give opportunity for participants to share insights which have not yet emerged in the interview:

- What do you appreciate about the leadership that others gave during the years of the Derg?
- What leadership qualities do you think are especially important when the church is being persecuted?
- What was your biggest challenge as a leader?

Questions in the concluding section of the interview explore the effect of persecution on the participant's faith and their experience with God under pressure:

- How did the persecution affect your relationship with God?
- How did God encourage or strengthen you as a leader during the years of persecution?

Overall, these interview questions could be seen as having a positive bias. Although they invite participants to reflect on the challenges of leading under persecution, the questions focus on leaders and leadership at their best, reflecting the positive orientation of Quinn's Fundamental State of Leadership as well as Positive Organizational Scholarship as a whole. Although a defence of this theoretical position is given in the second chapter of this thesis, Jan Reed – working within the framework of appreciative inquiry

research – offers support for using positive questions in interviewing based on methodological grounds.

Although this case study is not based on an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) research design, it does share with AI an emphasis on strengths, effectiveness and an exploration of what worked well. Reed identifies common objections to the positive orientation of AI research, including accusations that 1) it is naïve and idealistic, painting an unduly sanitized picture of human life, and that 2) it ignores or suppresses accounts of negative experience, leaving researchers open to accusations of selectivity or incomplete exploration.¹³

In response to the first objection, Reed argues that positive questions engage interviewees more deeply and for a longer time than other strategies because people naturally gravitate toward ideas and images that provide nourishment and energy. Pragmatically, positive questions encourage participants to provide information and talk about their experiences in a nonthreatening atmosphere. “Problems and weaknesses” are often easier to address when taking an appreciative stance which, particularly in contexts of evaluation, can create freedom to discuss difficulties without fear of censure. Ellen Schall et al. confirm the power of a positively framed question to ease the anxiety of a research participant.¹⁴

What about the concern that a focus on positive questions undermines the goal of presenting a comprehensive picture of a phenomenon – “warts and all”? Reed counters that all research is partial, in the sense that it always has a focus and area of interest. Exploring positive experiences should be understood in this light.¹⁵ Although a goal of this study is to represent the experience of MKC leadership as fully and honestly as possible – without ignoring difficult or disconfirming data – it is an exploratory first step into the field of leadership under persecution and will certainly offer an incomplete view of the subject.

D. Reflexivity

Merriam stresses the need for all qualitative researchers to grapple with questions of bias, acknowledging the subjective nature of participant and researcher perceptions. “Because the primary instrument in qualitative research is human,” she notes, “all observations and analyses are filtered through that human being’s worldview, values and perspective.” This understanding is consistent with Stella

¹³ Jan Reed, *Appreciative Inquiry: Research for Change* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2007), Kindle Electronic Edition: Chapter 2, Locations 836-842 and Chapter 4, Locations 1422-1427.

¹⁴ Jan Reed, *Appreciative Inquiry*, Chapter 2, Locations 514-609, 836-842; Ellen Schall et al., “Appreciative Narratives as Leadership Research: Matching Method to Lens,” in *Constructive Discourse and Human Organization, Advances in Appreciate Inquiry, Volume 1*, ed. David L. Cooperrider and Michel Avital, 147-170 (Bingley, UK, Emerald Group, 2004).

¹⁵ Reed, *Appreciative Inquiry*, Chapter 4, Locations 1422-1441.

Nkomo's call for scholars of leadership to exercise epistemic awareness and reflexivity by acknowledging their own cultural identity and position as they engage in their work. Swinton and Mowat describe *reflexivity* as a mode of knowing which accepts the impossibility of the researcher standing outside the research field gathering objective knowledge. In light of that, they argue that "reflexivity is the process of critical self-reflection carried out by the researcher throughout the research process that enables her to monitor and respond to her contribution to the proceedings."¹⁶

As a qualitative researcher, I needed access to a cultural and experiential world which is largely foreign to me. Although I share the same faith in Jesus Christ and a similar vocation in church leadership as the research participants, I am shaped by a notably different context. An English-speaking Canadian Mennonite pastor of European descent, I understand something about carrying a minority identity within my culture, but do so with the benefit of significant respect from most fellow citizens, legal protection, and broad freedom to live out my call. In addition, I experience opportunities and challenges that arise from living in one of the most economically prosperous pluralistic democracies in the world. I have undertaken this research as a stranger to Ethiopian culture, politics and economic conditions.

Pranee Liamputtong argues that qualitative approaches are far more appropriate for cross-cultural research than positivistic methods, such as surveys, which tend to alienate participants. Because Ethiopia stands as a historical exception to colonialism in Africa, I did not anticipate that interviewees would view my research as a tool of marginalization or exploitation, as may be the case within some people groups.¹⁷ Still, Tibebe Eshete observes an Ethiopian cultural prejudice against formal interviews, noting:

Ethiopians, in general, exhibit a tendency not to be open to oral interviews since this is associated mostly with interrogation. This is especially true when it comes to religion. Religion is not a favored topic for interviews because it is considered to be private, a matter of the heart and the spirit, in short a sacred topic not meant for academic consumptions. The negative experience of the Revolution and the general suspicion that ethnic politics has introduced has compounded the situation.

For his own research, Tibebe adopted "an extremely informal" style of interview, encouraging interviewees to tell stories about their lives rather than using direct questions seeking immediate answers.

¹⁶ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications*, 22; Stella Nkomo, "A Postcolonial and Anti-colonial Reading of 'African' Leadership and Management in Organization Studies: Tensions, Contradictions and Possibilities," *Organization* 18, no. 3 (May 2011): 380; Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 59-61.

¹⁷ Pranee Liamputtong, "Cross-Cultural Research and Qualitative Inquiry," *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, 1, no. 1 (July 2010): 16-29.

He did not use an audio recording device or formal writing during his interviews in order to create an environment in which participants would feel as free as possible to talk honestly about their experiences.¹⁸

As a cross-cultural researcher I needed to rely on the expertise of others to help me navigate the unfamiliar terrain of Ethiopian geography and culture, and practice what Liamputtong describes as “healing methodology,” marked by love, compassion, reciprocity, and respect as I sought to learn from research participants.¹⁹ Alemu Checole became a key partner in this endeavour. A highly respected MKC leader active throughout the revolutionary period, Alemu agreed to serve as a guide and translator, assisting with the logistics of arranging interviews and providing translation between English and Amharic when necessary. A retired English teacher and author with a Master of Arts degree in Linguistics from Syracuse University, Alemu was especially well equipped for this role. Alemu provided valuable feedback on the first draft of interview questions, affirming that they were culturally intelligible, appropriate and relevant. He also suggested adding a question about MKC leaders’ experience of team work during the revolutionary period. It proved to be a helpful dimension of inquiry. Alemu created a Braille version of the Interview Guide for himself and an Amharic version for participants who do not read English. He then provided a copy of the guide to most participants before the day of their interview.

Prior to beginning each interview, I read through, explained and invited the research participant to sign the *Interview Consent Form* included in Appendix B of this thesis. As part of my commitment to ethical research, and to meet the requirements of the Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary Institutional Review Board, the consent form addresses the purpose of the study, the role of the participant, risks and benefits, confidentiality, compensation, the voluntary nature of the research, and how information shared will be handled. Alemu worked with an assistant to create an Amharic translation of the consent form for the sake of participants who do not read English.

In addition to increasing my contextual awareness through feedback from Alemu Checole and reading relevant background materials, in late March and early April 2014 I conducted three pilot interviews with former MKC leaders currently living in Pennsylvania and Indiana, providing the Interview Guide to each participant ahead of time. Each not only provided primary data for the thesis topic, but also

¹⁸ Tibebe Eshete, “Growing through the Storms: The History of the Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia, 1941-1991,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 2005), 48-49.

¹⁹ Pranee Liamputtong, “Cross-Cultural Research and Qualitative Inquiry,” 16-29.

affirmed the interview questions, style and relevance of the study as a whole. They assured me that audio recording would be entirely appropriate with the permission of the interviewee.

During a four week research trip to Ethiopia in late April and early May 2014, I carried out nineteen additional interviews with twenty-one MKC leaders who were active in ministry during the Ethiopian revolution. Fourteen participants required Amharic/English translation. Contra Tibebe Eshete's observations about Ethiopian suspicion of interviews, research participants seemed to engage the interview process with warmth, enthusiasm and honesty. I am certain that the personal involvement of Alemu Checole – a trusted leader and brother in Christ – helped to establish the credibility of this research in the eyes of participants. Each interviewee consented to having an audio recording of the conversation made. After preliminary conversation and signing consent forms, interviews averaged 109 minutes in length. In total, forty hours of interview time were recorded with twenty-four leaders. On two occasions, two interviewees shared the same interview appointment. Written notes about the data collection process – prior to, during and after interviews – were recorded in a research log, including observations about nonverbal communication, time and setting of the meeting, emerging insights and other interpretive comments. Following the interviews, the audio recordings were used to create full written transcriptions of each one.

In his discussion of the ethics of interview-based qualitative research, Irving Seidman cites Maisha Winn, who urges researchers to be “worthy witnesses” of their participants, aware of the privilege inherent in this work.²⁰ This challenge takes on additional depth if the task is indeed seen as participation in Christ's priestly listening ministry, as Osmer suggests. Without question, it was an honour and a rich opportunity for discovery to listen to and reflect upon the experience of men and women who have shared church leadership under persecution.

E. Data analysis

The analysis of research data is a dynamic process bridging both the descriptive and interpretive tasks of practical theology, making sense of empirical information, interacting with theory and crystalizing learning. Although it cannot be reduced to a particular analytical technique, what methods best support this endeavour? Seidman highlights the challenge of working with interview transcripts, seeking connections between the content of different interviews, explaining those connections, and building interpretative

²⁰ Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, 144.

categories with integrity. “The danger,” he writes, “is that the researcher will try to force the excerpts into categories, and the categories into themes that he or she already has in mind, rather than let them develop from the experience of the participants as represented in the interviews.” In light of this, the researcher needs to approach transcripts with great openness about what is important, reducing data inductively rather than deductively. In other words, Seidman insists, “the researcher cannot address the material with a set of hypotheses to test or with a theory developed in another context to which he or she wishes to match the data.”²¹ Even so, it would be naïve to think one could approach the investigation theory-free. All research is pursued within some theoretical framework which shapes questions and suggests categories of interest.

Merriam proposes that coding – organizing data into categories – occurs at two levels: identifying information about the data (for example, categories identifying demographic characteristics or leadership roles of participants) and interpretive constructs related to analysis. Categories may be derived from at least three sources:

1. The researcher, who comes up with terms, concepts and categories that reflect what he or she sees in the data;
2. Classification patterns derived from category distinctions verbally made by interviewees;
3. Other theories compatible with the purpose and theoretical framework of the study.

Although she does not share Seidman’s absolute aversion to borrowed classification schemes, Merriam recognizes danger in merely selecting data through categories established by another theory because 1) it tends to hinder the generation of new categories, 2) its themes tend to be less relevant than ones emerging from the data, and 3) working with borrowed categories is more difficult because they are harder to find, fewer in number and not as rich.²² Günter Huber and Leo Gürtler observe, however, that applying pre-determined category systems is appropriate if the study does not aim at constructing theory from concepts emerging in the data. They also identify a fourth means of finding coding themes and categories: hypotheses emerging from the research question.²³

The analysis of primary data for this study began with coding interview transcripts and other first person accounts using categories emerging inductively from the text as well as from the theoretical

²¹ Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, 119, 129-130.

²² Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications*, 164, 182-183.

²³ Günter L. Huber, and Leo Gürtler, *Quad 7 Manual: The Analysis of Qualitative Data* (Tübingen, Germany: Softwarevertrieb Günter Huber, 2013), 68-69.

framework and interview questions. *Constant comparison* was part of the strategy for category construction. Because the four dimensions of Robert Quinn's theory of the Fundamental State of Leadership provide structure to the interviews, they are also reflected in the coding. Specific categories, however, grew out of the research data. Following Merriam, thematic categories were intended to reflect the purpose of the research, be exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitive to the data and conceptually congruent. In addition to conceptual codes, profile codes identified characteristics of research participants, such as gender, geography of their work and leadership role.²⁴

Data analysis was facilitated by the use of AQUAD 7 Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). After interview transcripts were imported into an AQUAD 7 database, the software enabled data to be labelled with multiples codes, which served to facilitate the filing, searching, retrieving and organizing of source material. This did not, of course, replace the need for the researcher's personal immersion in the data. The results of this analysis are reported in Chapter Six. Interviewees are represented by assigned pseudonyms, with the exception of four research participants who asked that their real names be used.

²⁴ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications*, 159-166, 178-184; Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, 127-132, 183-184; Huber and Gürtler, *Quad 7 Manual: The Analysis of Qualitative Data*, 77.

CHAPTER 6 – ANALYSIS

The Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) experienced profound transformation between the onset of Ethiopia's socialist revolution in 1974 and the fall of the Marxist government in 1991. Amid the uncertainty and chaos created by a regime bent on eradicating evangelical Christianity from Ethiopia, the church 1) grew from 800 to 34,000 baptized members, 2) greatly expanded its geographic reach, 3) dramatically increased the number of men and women engaged in active ministry, 4) transitioned from being "a Sunday church to an everyday church," 5) became financially self-supporting, 6) adopted a radically new ministry structure, and 7) supported a contagious spiritual vitality among its members. How did men and women in MKC lead with purpose, integrity, love and creativity under the pressure of persecution? What did the practice of leadership look like? In what ways was it transformational? To what extent does Robert Quinn's theory of the Fundamental State of Leadership describe the experience of MKC leaders? How did they understand God to be at work among them?

As noted in the preceding chapter, the primary source material for this study comes from first person accounts of men and women active in MKC leadership during the Derg era. Interviews with twenty-four research participants, eight written accounts, and one video documentary offer rich testimony about the experience of leaders under conditions of persecution. The analysis of this material in this chapter attends to both the descriptive/empirical and interpretative tasks of practical theology. Thick description of MKC leadership experience requires careful attention to the particular stories, reports, reflections and insights shared by research participants and others. At the same time, it searches out significant patterns and themes among diverse testimonies. The categories of Quinn's authentic transformational leadership theory function as an explanatory lens through which the data is weighed and interpreted.

The first four main sections of the chapter correspond to dimensions of Quinn's theory of the Fundamental State of Leadership: Purpose (purpose centeredness), Love (other focus), Integrity (internal drive) and Creativity (external openness). In each section, MKC leadership experience under persecution is described and interpreted in relation to one of these categories. The fifth section, Commitment, considers a theme prominent in Quinn's theory of transformational leadership and in the testimonies of MKC leaders.

A. Purpose: Boldness amid suffering

Robert Quinn argues that in a normal state of functioning, organizational effectiveness wanes as group members gravitate toward comfort, expending problem-solving energy toward preserving equilibrium rather than pursuing a compelling purpose. As leaders enter the Fundamental State of Leadership, however, they fully commit to creating exceptional results, persevering toward their goal without regard to personal cost. During the Ethiopian revolution, evangelical church leadership required considerable sacrifice. If one's primary goal was to be safe or comfortable, one would not take the risks necessary to function as a Christian leader. Persecution forced men and women to make a decision: fully commit to purposeful leadership in the church or avoid active Christian service. This section of the chapter explores 1) dynamics of the decision to function beyond comfort and certainty, and 2) key objectives pursued by Meserete Kristos Church leaders in this era.

1. Beyond comfort and certainty

In interviews and other source material, MKC leaders describe their decision to pursue God's purpose above personal safety or comfort. Gemechu Gebre Telila identifies a pivotal commitment made by the elders of Wonji Gefersa MKC on the evening of Sunday, January 24, 1982. Government authorities had come to the church compound the previous day to close the church and seize its property. Other MKC congregations throughout Ethiopia had been closed earlier in the week, the denominational head office and guest house in Addis Ababa occupied by armed men, and six members of the MKC Executive Committee arrested and imprisoned. To avoid attention from authorities, five members of the Wonji Gefersa leadership team met in an elder's car and for three hours drove around a sugar plantation, shielded by the darkness of night and the height of the cane. Gemechu describes the essence of their conversation:

How...were they to be salt and light in these ominous circumstances? They were convinced that as leaders they...needed to live exemplary lives, encouraging...the faith of others. If one of them were to weaken, other Christians...would be more sorely tempted to yield to pressure. As the hours passed, so did the resolve that if necessary they not only would be thrown into prison but also would die for Jesus at any time.

They agreed to support each other and together care for the congregation, including imprisoned believers and their families, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit. Although unable to legally meet and

worship in public, “they would adapt to operating the church in secret and would commit themselves to [the] possibility of prison or even death.”¹

As persecution intensified, not all who were once active in MKC leadership were ready to bear the risks of continued involvement. Alemu recalls that a fellow elder team member resigned in fear in response to a rumour that MKC leaders would be arrested, explaining “I have a wife. I have children, too.” Gemechu says that three of his co-elders “chose to be more private or quiet about their Christian convictions” after the government closed the church. Lema² notes that “some of us were not willing to face the challenge” of persecution.³ Kelile describes the “sifting” effect of Derg opposition to the church:

...before the revolution...Christianity was kind of smooth and nothing really troublesome. We couldn't really tell who was a genuine Christian...So the coming of the socialist revolution helped to sift the wheat and the tare. Some left because they wanted a better position in government work ...Some left because they were really frightened of the suffering that might follow. Some left because they didn't really have the true, solid faith that was needed to face the challenges of persecution.⁴

Those who persevered in both Christian faith and leadership understood the potential cost, particular during the Red Terror, but chose to relinquish comfort and lead with courage. Solomon remembers saying to himself as he left his bedroom in the morning, “I may not come back and sleep on this bed.” He explains his decision to be faithful to God’s purposes even if it led to his death:

...I was anticipating...martyrdom could come on my way. I was preparing myself for that. By temperament, I am a fearful person. But if it was God's plan, I knew that I would not escape it ... During the Red Terror time, they used to kill and throw people on the streets. I was expecting to be killed at one point...I used to go around and see the dead bodies and prepare myself psychologically...I imagined myself killed and thrown on the street, but it didn't happen...⁵

Conditions of persecution forced evangelical Christians, especially leaders, to grapple with great uncertainties about their own future. Dawit observes that “even going out and coming home safe was a

¹ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa, Ethiopia, during the Derg, 1974-1991: ‘God Works for Good,’” (MA thesis, Eastern Mennonite Seminary, 2002), 41-45.

² Interviewees are represented by assigned pseudonyms, with the exception of four research participants who asked that their real names be used.

³ Interview 10; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 56; Interview 17; Nathan Hege, *Beyond our Prayers: Anabaptist Church Growth in Ethiopia, 1948-1998* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 189. The minutes from an MKC General Church Council meeting in March 1984 identify the need for elders to be chosen in some congregations. They note that an elder in one of the congregations “went back to the world; he has not harmed us, although he knows all our secrets.”

⁴ Interview 4; in Interview 19, Tengene similarly describes effect of persecution on the church: “The persecution was like a sifting process. Those that were not true would not really stand the pressure, so it was only the genuine who came to the church. So the believers who made that decision were resolute and they were committed...”

⁵ Interview 18.

miracle for us every day. We didn't know who was going to imprison you or...harm you...I said good-bye to my family: 'Pray for me. It is in God's hand whether I come back or not.'"⁶

Gemechu observes that in the Derg years, "Christianity was a matter of life or death." When preparing for arrest it was common for leaders to leave personal valuables with their families as they said good-bye.⁷ Unsurprisingly, MKC leaders emphasize the importance of commitment for Christian leadership. Desta says that a leader should be ready for imprisonment and even death: "Whatever comes, he should be committed and ready to pay the necessary sacrifice." Kifle observes that Christian leaders need to be ready "to be sacrificed...for the sake of the gospel, for Christ's sake." Kelile acknowledges, "Of course it was really hard...to be a leader during the Derg, but...even though it was difficult, I wanted to serve God; I wanted to serve my church."⁸

⁶ Interview 1; In Interview 3 Berihun, an elder from Addis Ababa, describes the impact of persecution on the Christian community, his distress at violence in the city, the possibility of martyrdom, and the need to trust God in the midst of it:

People were expelled from their work, and they were discouraged. Because they were Christians they were not promoted. Many lost their children during the Derg. There was Red Terror and White Terror. People had been massacred...I was living near the French Embassy in Addis and I was...[driving] 15 kilometres from my house to where I was working...On my way, I saw piles and piles of dead bodies, bloodshed, blood flowing...I was getting shocked every day. "O Lord, how long?" ...When you go driving...suddenly you would be stopped by police and...investigated and your car is searched; your house is searched. You don't know what going to come tomorrow...Trust in God in those days was like an anchor for us.

In Interview 17 Lema describes similar feelings of uncertainty:

...there was no security. Lack of security is a great challenge. Every day you are expecting death. Every day they are killing the young people. When you go out you find dead bodies. So when is my time? Even in families, when they went to their job: "Do we meet tonight?" "I don't know." They just greet each other, "See you. If it is God's will, we will meet; otherwise, see you in heaven." So you don't know. You are not secure. You don't know what will happen.

⁷ Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 93. In 1976 evangelist Kedir Delchume learned of his impending arrest by local cadres. In Interview 8 Teru, a family friend, remembers that he withdrew his money from the bank, gave his bank book and wedding ring to his wife, and told her, "I may be shot. I may be killed...I want you to pray because hard times are coming." In Interviews 4 and 10 Kelile and Alemu recall separate occasions when they went to authorities to advocate on behalf of church members who had been harassed, beaten and imprisoned. In both cases, they took off their watches and rings, gave them to their wives and said good-bye to their families in case they did not return. In Interview 22, however, Bekele remembers that when armed *kebele* officers came to his home to arrest him, he was told to leave his watch and ring with his family. When his wife began to cry, he insisted, "I am not going to leave my ring. Even if I need to die, I will die with it. You can cut my finger and just take it. I am not going to leave [it] here." Hege, *Beyond our prayers*, 24, reports that when Shamsudin Abdo, former chairperson of MKC, was arrested in 1982, he told his wife and children, "I don't know where I'm being taken. I may come back this evening; maybe in a week's time, maybe in a month or a year, or maybe never. The Lord will take care of you." His family wept; he kissed them and was imprisoned for four and a half years.

⁸ Interviews 4, 5 and 11; in Interview 4, Kelile describes how the church's emphasis on costly discipleship prior to the Marxist era had prepared leaders for persecution:

We learned from Bible lessons that a leader should really commit himself unto death as a leader, to follow the truth, to stand for the truth. We had learned that there was sacrifice. A leader shouldn't be frightened and run away. The coming of the socialist revolution...tested our faith. What we had learned to be true...had to be put into practice: to commit our lives unto death, if need be. We should give ourselves to the glory of God and to the keeping of the church.

A number of MKC leaders who were outside Ethiopia during the Marxist era returned to the country in response to God's call. Others had opportunity to leave, but refused to abandon their ministries. After her husband was released from three months in jail and received threats against his life, Desta told him, "Many of your friends have gone abroad. Why don't you go abroad? ...I don't want to live without having a husband and my children without a father." Her husband refused, saying, "No, I won't leave my people. I won't go away because of fear. I will die with the people, if I die. And if we survive, we survive. We are together. I am not going anywhere." After MKC went underground, Berihun had an opportunity to study theology in the United States. An invitation to remain and serve the church full-time, however, drew his attention to Hebrews 11:23-27 which describes Moses rejecting the luxury of Pharaoh's court in order to identify with the oppressed people of God. Berihun chose to stay in Ethiopia.⁹

Others returned to Ethiopia despite reasons to remain elsewhere. Hakim spent four years in the United States, working with Eastern Mennonite Missions and pursuing graduate studies. After completing course work for a doctorate in education, he received an invitation from MKC to become director of Nazareth Bible Academy. Returning to Ethiopia in 1979, he served in a variety of leadership roles until his 1982 arrest and four and a half year imprisonment. Reflecting on the decision to risk suffering, Hakim says:

[Persecution] is scary. You care for your personal safety...but then you also have another resource: of faith experience, commitment, my philosophy of life... [Everybody] has those tendencies to escape, to save your skin...but life is to meet these things. It is not only a response of the moment; it is what you have stored in your life that sustains you...The ups and downs help you, make you strong...[Persecution] affected me like any other person, but...reliance on the Lord: that was the resource that I had.

He describes how his decision to embrace Christian leadership in the midst of persecution issued from his most basic commitments: "You have to say, 'Well look, here are the choices. I have a choice.'" Confronting "the human tendency" to seek comfort one needs to say, "I have found the rudiments of my philosophy of life. Be it death or suffering, I will stick to it."¹⁰

⁹ Interviews 3 and 11; in Interview 6, Tewodros refers to another evangelist who was offered a thousand birr so he could return to the safety of his home community. "No," the man replied. "I am not going to run away from the work that God has given me."

¹⁰ Interview 16; in Interview 18 Solomon explains that as an employee of an oil exploration company he received a job transfer to Chad in the mid-1970s. His schedule involved a cycle of six weeks of work followed by two weeks at a leave center in France, but he spent his time off in Addis Ababa rather than Europe. After less than six months, he sensed God calling him to return to Ethiopia full-time. Solomon explains his decision to give up his relatively high-paying job to serve a church under increasing pressure: "I understood that God wanted me here in Ethiopia, even in the midst of bloodshed."

Leaders not only grappled with beatings, imprisonment and the possibility of martyrdom; the daily exercise of leadership also involved hardship and sacrifice. Although conditions were challenging for all leaders, elders particularly admire evangelists who “sacrificed many of their benefits” and “went out of their comfort zone in order to help the body of believers get strong and be with the Lord. They had commitment.”¹¹ Evangelists often travelled long distances on foot, their movement constrained by Derg checkpoints throughout the country. Getaneh Ayele’s extensive walking permanently damaged his legs. Kifle, an evangelist in a remote region, describes his loneliness, the difficulty of finding a house in which to spend the night, and the challenge of sleeping in bedbug and flea-infested sleeping quarters. Often hungry and lacking funds for adequate clothing, evangelists were known for their dedication to Christian ministry. Lema, who once spent the night in a tree while Derg officers searched for him, remembers: “We didn’t have a comfortable place.” Even so, he adds, “God is able to sustain our lives. It was not easy, but God is good.” Berihun observes that in remote areas, “there was no comfort zone...no food...and no sleeping place; we just slept on the dust, sometimes on the top of a tree for days to escape detection.”¹²

MKC leaders tended to be sleep-deprived; sometimes due to stress-induced sleeplessness, but often because they functioned late into the evening, even all night. Commitment, then, involved not simply willingness to risk martyrdom, but daily inconvenience. Alemu, a full-time teacher and elder, describes the challenge of adding church leadership responsibilities to a full work schedule: “If you are not really committed, you can say, ‘I am too tired. I have done hard work during the day.’ But our meetings were mostly at night, so unless you are really...devoted to God’s work, it’s easy to have excuses.”¹³

Leaders were highly committed to their work, confident that it was part of God’s larger purpose. Berihun explains that leaders who escaped long-term imprisonment believed God had given them freedom “because of his vital purpose: that was to lead the church in adverse conditions,” adding, “Each one of us was committed to his call and committed to one another...the leaders were ready to pay any price.”¹⁴

¹¹ Interview 15; in Interview 16, Hakim also expresses his admiration for the “self-denial,” commitment and faithfulness of evangelists, who “left their government jobs...to work for the church, to work for the kingdom of God,” often needing to spend time apart from their families.

¹² Interviews 1, 3, 5, 17, 19, and 20; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 205.

¹³ Alemu Checole, assisted by Samuel Asefa, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” in *Anabaptist Songs in African Hearts*, ed. John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2006), 236; Interviews 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 20 and 22.

¹⁴ Interview 3; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 46-47, says that evangelical Christians and Marxists shared much in common: “Both were deeply committed to beliefs which shaped the ways in which they lived their lives, and both were willing to risk their comfort for the sake of their convictions.” In

On the evening that the Wonji Gerfersa MKC congregation was closed, its prayer groups gathered in a member's home. Although shaken, they strengthened their resolve to pursue God's purposes amid the intensifying persecution. Gemechu reports that for two hours "they wept and sought to know God's plan," praying that God would "use this experience of persecution as a starting point for a great missionary work." In the course of the evening, the group claimed Jeremiah 29:11 as God's word of comfort to them: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope" – a promise that church members would recall many times in the coming years.¹⁵

2. Leadership objectives

To what purposes did MKC leaders devote their energy? Reflections about their objectives emerge in response to the questions, "What results did you want to create as a leader? What were you hoping to accomplish?" and elsewhere in interviews, documents and video testimony. Research participants identify five closely interconnected goals which motivated their leadership between 1974 and 1991: a) personal faithfulness to Jesus Christ, b) evangelism and church growth, c) strengthening the church, d) multiplying and equipping leaders, and e) growth in the kingdom of God and pursuit of God's glory.

a. Personal faithfulness to Jesus Christ

"We, as Christians have one aim...living for Christ...who died for us."¹⁶ Accounts of leadership in MKC are permeated with a foundational love for Jesus Christ. Almost all research participants describe transforming moments in their relationship with God that redirected their sense of purpose. In answer to the question, "How did you become a leader in the Meserete Kristos Church?" many spoke about their journey to faith in Jesus. At various points in the interviews leaders identify other ways in which God formed and changed them.¹⁷ Some describe a process of conversion from self-defined ambition to an embrace of God's purpose. All highlight the importance of dependence on God, sustained through spiritual disciplines, especially Bible study, prayer and fasting, animated by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Interview 17 Melaku says that while "there was no comfort" or physical inducement to attract one to ministry, "Christ, working for Christ's kingdom and with the non-believers, trying to bring them to Christ, that was our food."

¹⁵ Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 42.

¹⁶ Interview 1; In Interview 21 Teku says: "I tried to pursue the footprint of our Lord Jesus Christ and his prophets."

¹⁷ Eighteen leaders described their initial commitment to Christ at some point during the interview; of the remaining six research participants, three described another transforming event in their relationship with God.

i. Conversion from self-defined ambition to God's purposes

One cannot understand the behaviour of MKC leaders under persecution apart from their devotion to Jesus and resolve to follow him faithfully, a commitment often shaped by a multi-step process of personal transformation in which a leader became more fully aligned with the purposes of God. Solomon describes how dissatisfaction with normal human ambition paved the way for his new birth in Christ and a transformed understanding of his life purpose prior to the socialist revolution:

As all people, I had ambitions. Three of the main ambitions I had were 1) to be a well-known scholar, 2) to be a prosperous person, 3) to have a pretty wife and a family.

I had also other ambitions. But at one time, I said to myself, "Okay, [when] I have achieved all this, so what? What then?" ...I was looking for purpose and meaning in life. I said, "Is this all? ... Is this the purpose of life? ...becoming prosperous or a well-known scholar or having pretty wife and a family? Is that all? I was perplexed. I came to...a kind of despair.

Although he tried to suppress his questions, they nagged at him until a friend invited him to join a Bible study group. When Solomon "heard that Jesus is the truth and the light," the questions buried in his heart were answered. He says, "I became a follower," adding, "When I came to Christ, it was a radical change....I started witnessing to...everyone I knew."¹⁸

Dawit describes three significant turning points in his relationship with God. Growing up in a family that adhered both to Ethiopian Orthodoxy and animism, he received Jesus Christ in the MKC *Youth for Christ* program at the age of thirteen. Baptized the following year, Dawit continued involvement with MKC and *yäsämay bərhan* (Heavenly Sunshine) for the next eight years, but he describes his Christian commitment at that time as "in and out" – until a transforming experience with the Holy Spirit:

I mean, I liked Jesus and sometimes I liked playing football and watching football...I was on and off, but...one evening I was alone. I was reading the Bible from the Gospel of Luke. Suddenly, a bright light just filled the room that I was in. I don't know. I can't express it now. I couldn't...stand or even sit. I fell down on the floor. And since then, I am different...The old has gone... [That] was the day that totally changed my life.

I can't describe it...you can say it's like an electric shock; it's more than that. An electric shock hurts, but this one strengthens you...It is power, strengthening you. It changes you from the inside out.

While training to teach at a mission school Dawit experienced a third spiritual re-orientation. Missionary teacher Henry Gamber asked students a series of questions: "When did you receive Jesus Christ?" "For how many people have you shared your testimony?" "How many have become Christian?"

¹⁸ Interview 18.

Able to answer only the first question, Dawit grappled with his failure to share the gospel with others and made a fresh resolution to God:

That empty paper touched my heart. "God, if it was the last day, and it was the day I appeared in front of you, what do I say? What's my answer, Lord?" I fell down on the floor, and said, "God, put mercy upon me. Father, from this day onward, I will be faithful in serving you." So this is the third commitment that...changed my life....I became serious in all sides.... It made me a twenty-four hour Christian.¹⁹

Kifle describes his resistance to the call of God based on his desire for a life of comfort. In 1966 – while a member of the Qale Heywet church – Kifle was asked to serve as a rural evangelist but refused, reasoning it would require excessive hardship. He moved to Nazareth and joined MKC, but struggled for the next five or six years: searching for work, failing his grade six government exams and sometimes getting beaten. In September 1972, however, he had an encounter with Jesus, "a special meeting or call from the Lord." He explains that "The Lord talked to me in my prayer that I should be willing to go into... church service." In response, Kifle wept, prayed, and began to seriously worship and work with MKC members as the Lord renewed his life. Despite this, he held back from full surrender to God. In 1976, at a spiritual life conference at Nazareth Bible Academy, an evangelist issued a challenge: "Some of you are refusing to tell the good news to people who haven't heard. You refuse, but God will make you preach, and will make you tell the good news." Kifle explains:

I was listening to that message and I was saying in my heart, "No, Lord. I don't want to be an evangelist. I just want to work and pay my tithes and do little errands in the church. You know, do activities in the church that would be pleasing to you, but not be an evangelist." So I was again kind of refusing. But the Lord was speaking to me...so I started working, going here and there and telling the good news...I wasn't really officially ordained as an evangelist, but I began to serve in the church.²⁰

The testimonies of Solomon, Dawit and Kifle highlight competing ambitions vying for the hearts of young Ethiopians prior to and following conversion to Christ. In the revolutionary era, one did not assume leadership responsibilities in an Ethiopian evangelical church in order to secure a comfortable life for oneself. Wholehearted allegiance to Jesus put one at odds with prevailing cultural and political winds.

ii. Dependence on God for comfort

A primary goal, then, for MKC leaders in the Derg years, was to be personally faithful to Jesus. Explored in more depth below in Section B, this priority of love for God, faithfulness to Jesus, reliance on

¹⁹ Interview 1.

²⁰ Interview 5.

the Holy Spirit and enthusiastic practice of spiritual disciplines infuses the research material, animating other dimensions of purpose and also expressions of love, integrity and learning. It was both a magnet for persecution and the wellspring of fruitful leadership as men and women strove to remain tenaciously steadfast in their obedience to Jesus, seeking comfort from God rather than in physical circumstances.²¹

b. Evangelism and church growth

Passion for evangelism is a prominent theme running through interviews and other source material, expressed in i) statements about its importance in the life and leadership of MKC leaders, ii) descriptions of persistent, creative strategies for spreading the good news of Jesus in communities with an established MKC congregation, iii) evangelical risk-taking in the face of persecution, iv) missionary initiative in new territory, and v) confidence that evangelism is a participation in God's work.

i. The priority of evangelism

Meserete Kristos Church leaders identify evangelism as a vital objective central to their vocation as disciples of Jesus Christ. Lema says, "Our primary goal is bringing people to Christ in order to glorify him," adding, "We do have that passion in loving hearts, reaching people for Christ. When people are accepting Christ as their own personal Saviour: that is our joy." In the same interview his co-worker Melaku describes the work of evangelism as "our food." Explaining why he admired other key leaders, Berihun identifies their "big vision of reaching unreached people, even those across the border of Ethiopia," adding that "they craved the salvation of the lost." Aster Debossie describes how her desire to tell others about Jesus flows from her own relationship with God: "I am very glad to be a daughter of God and serve God...Because of this, I love...sharing the gospel." Zere says, "We knew that...most people were in the dark...following the world. We wanted to snatch them out of this world and bring them to the

²¹ Interviewees exhibit their dependence on God's comfort in a variety of ways. One expresses appreciation for "the Lord's protection in those difficult years" (Interview 11); another observes that despite hardship "the Lord really gave me strength and comfort" (Interview 5). Many highlight Scriptures reflecting the theme of God's comfort toward his people, including Gen 15:1 (Interview 12), Josh 1:7 (Interview 20), Josh 24:15 (Interview 9), Job 36:11 (Interview 14), Ps 23 (Interviews 3, 4, 7, 11, 15 and 19), Ps 46 (Interview 18), Ps 90:15 (Interview 17), Ps 91 (Interview 14), Ps 121:8 (Interview 12), Ps 124 (Interview 10), Isa 25:1-5 (Interview 12), Isa 40:21-31 (Interview 3), Isa 41:8-10 (Interview 5), Isa 43:1-3 (Interviews 6 and 11), Isa 46:3-4 (Interview 10), Isa 49:15 (Interview 5), Isa 50:10 (Interview 5), Jer 17:7-8 (Interview 9), Dan 6 (Interviews 5 and 13), Mic 7:7-8 (Interview 10), Matt 10:30 (Interview 13), Matt 16:18 (Interview 3), Luke 2:25-38 (Interview 8), John 12:23-26 (Interview 3), John 16:33 (Interview 10), Acts 12 (Interview 13), Acts 16:16-40 (Interview 13), Rom 8:28 (Interview 19), 2 Cor 6: 3-10 (Interview 2), Phil 1:29-30 (Interview 21), 1 Pet 1:24-25 (Interview 4), 1 Pet 4:13 (Interview 3). Commenting on Scripture, one notes, "There are very comforting words there" (Interview 10); another say, "That was also a comforting word for me" (Interview 4). Speaking of the Lord, another says, "He was my comforter" (Interview 15).

saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. That was...the one big result we wanted to...accomplish, so that many would know the Lord and follow him.²²

Church members shared a conviction that “spiritual maturity always leads to concern for the lost souls,”²³ a theme reflected in leaders’ preaching and teaching. Dawit describes a meeting after the closure of the church in which fellow evangelist Kassa Agafari issued a memorable challenge based on Matthew 28:18-20, with strong emphasis on the word *go*:

It was a powerful preaching. Pastor Kassa: that day he was a different person. The preaching...just mobilized us to go out. “Look, now the Derg closed everything, but the Holy Spirit says, ‘Go out. Go and preach! Go!’”

Hearing this message [I asked myself], “Where do I go? How do I go?” I remember it stirred most of us to be bolder and to go out.²⁴

Nathan Hege observes that MKC members were more concerned about faithful witness to the Lord than avoiding suffering. Recognizing that proclamation of the gospel often triggered opposition, leaders regularly risked personal safety and comfort to share the message of Jesus with nonbelievers. Many would have agreed with evangelist Ijigu Woldegebriel, who asserts that “When we are serious about preaching the gospel, there is a price to pay.”²⁵

²² Interviews 3, 13 and 17; Aaron Lehman, “Aster Debossie: Meserete Kristos Churchwoman in Lay Leadership in Ethiopia 1974-1991,” (BA senior paper, Goshen College, 2003),” 12-14; Desta (Interview 11) and Nyala (Interview 12) and their husbands named their daughters “Gospel” and “Testimony” as expressions of the importance of evangelism.

²³ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 61.

²⁴ Interview 1.

²⁵ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 179-181; Abera Ertiro, “History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth from 1951-2003,” (BA senior paper, Meserete Kristos College, 2003), 33, cites Tezera Kebede, who says that “the leaders and evangelists were committed to God and decided to pay any kind of price for the sake of God’s purpose.” In Interview 19 Tengene observes that: “During those years not [just] anybody would come and say, ‘I am going to be a servant of God and work.’ They wouldn’t because it demands life commitment. Without the grace of God, no man can really be committed that way.”

Shortly after MKC re-opened following the collapse of the Derg, one leader, in Michael Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*, 29 minutes (Worcester, PA: Gateway Films/Vision Video, 1992), said, “A true church, a church that is following the ways of God, that is Christ-like, will always face persecution, and we as a true evangelical church will openly preach and witness to people.”

In Interview 3 Berihun describes how persecution brings opportunities to glorify God and witness to Christ leads to persecution:

Listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit and listen to what God says in his Word, and wait on him. God has ways and means, through fire and turbulent waters. Persecution can happen at any place, at any time. When the people of God are ready to do the will of God in its fullness, then persecution would start, whether we like it or not. Why? Because we are going to snatch people from the grip of the evil one; so he does not let us simply do [this]. He would fight us back and we have to fight back in God’s ways and means.

ii. Strategies for spreading the good news of Jesus

How did leaders in the Meserete Kristos Church express evangelical initiative? What strategies did the church use to spread faith in Jesus Christ?

- Cell groups nurtured a passion for evangelism among members. In one community, MKC spent three days fasting and praying for the salvation of nonbelievers and then laid hands on members, commissioning them to give witness to Jesus among friends, at their workplace, school, in transit and anywhere they had opportunity.²⁶
- In Wonji Gefersa, every MKC member was expected to share their faith with at least one person every year, confident that the Holy Spirit would empower them for the task. A leader from Addis Ababa notes that “all who became Christians were active soul-winners.”²⁷
- In Nazareth, Christian high school students were encouraged to reach out to one fellow student during break time, or before or after class.²⁸
- MKC members invited non-believing neighbours and friends into their homes for lunch or tea.²⁹
- A gospel witness group among high school students regularly divided into two sub-groups. One would pray while the other went out to evangelize, later returning to report their experience to the praying group.³⁰
- Children brought friends to secret Sunday school classes during the underground years.³¹
- The church took advantage of public occasions like birthday parties, Christmas, New Year’s and Easter feasts, weddings and funerals to proclaim faith in Jesus Christ.³²
- When a believer died, leaders openly preached the gospel message at the burial ceremony. The next evening, when people gathered in the home of the bereaved family, sermon cards with scripture verses were distributed to Christian guests who would speak on the selection they received; later, church members had follow-up conversations about these messages with other guests.³³
- In the marketplace and over afternoon coffee, women used traditional Ethiopian female group gatherings to talk about Jesus with neighbours.³⁴
- Imprisoned church leaders shared the gospel with fellow inmates; one mass arrest of evangelical believers led to an outbreak of revival in Addis Ababa prisons that continued long after their release. When not in detention, many leaders made regular visits to local jails to encourage believers and lead others to personal faith in Christ.³⁵

²⁶ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 61; Interviews 4 and 14.

²⁷ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 61-62; Interview 3.

²⁸ Abera Ertiro, “Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth,” 36.

²⁹ Interview 10.

³⁰ Abera Ertiro, “Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth,” 36; Interview 8.

³¹ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 62.

³² Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 62; Interview 10.

³³ Abera Ertiro, “Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth,” 36; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 205; Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Interviews 1, 5, 10 and 22.

³⁴ Lehman, “Aster Debossie,” 25-26; Interview 22.

³⁵ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 62; Lehman, “Aster Debossie,” 29; Interviews 1, 2, 3, 16; in Interview 3 Berihun describes an incident in which 250 Christians at a young adult renewal meeting in Addis Ababa were arrested and placed in five different police stations among 3000 prisoners: “We started to witness to prisoners. Some notorious prisoners came to know the Lord. Revival started in the prison. After three

- Believers invited neighbours who might be receptive to the gospel to their homes for drama presentations accompanied by sharing from the Word of God.³⁶

- Leaders testified to their faith in public settings hostile to evangelical Christianity, such as political indoctrination sessions or to crowds trying to intimidate them.

Leaders modeled the priority of evangelism for other church members. Abebech describes how she and other women integrated testimony to Jesus in their daily lives:

We were witnessing one-to-one to people. When we went to the grinding mill to have our teff or wheat ground, we would...tell the good news to people who sat beside us, or on the road, like when we were going by...horse cart. We would witness to them. We felt that it was our responsibility to tell the good news to people who hadn't heard. Many responded positively, so that was one thing that I really enjoyed doing.³⁷

iii. Evangelical risk-taking and persecution

Many MKC members and leaders persistently gave testimony to their faith in Jesus Christ, knowing that it could expose them to hostility and opposition – or lead someone into the kingdom of God. Jazarah describes her Christian witness at the hotel she owned and operated: “In the hotel I would witness to people... [The] communists would come...and say, ‘This is not the place...where you proclaim your faith. You go home. You can do it at home.’ But I said, ‘I am supposed to tell the good news everywhere, any place.’” So the Lord gave me the strength. I wasn't really frightened of them or afraid of them. She looks back with joy at the results of her witness:

There was a judge in the court. He used to come to my hotel, to drink coffee or whatever. I told him that he needed Jesus Christ. He didn't really express his faith at that time, but after a year I saw him at church. I don't know when he actually made the decision. Also, I would witness to my workers in the hotel – and half of those people who worked in the hotel are now strong Christians.³⁸

One could not know how one's audience or the authorities would respond to a presentation of the gospel. Haragawein, a middle-aged woman during the persecution, describes her passion for evangelism. After God healed her blindness, she learned to read and decided that no risk was too great to keep her from sharing Jesus with anyone who would listen. Shortly after the fall of the Derg regime, Haragawein said, “I

months...we were released. The revival in the prison continued. Some of the prisoners, after they [were] released, became evangelists. I knew later on that God wanted us to go to prison in order to witness to...[those] who did not have any hope to hear the gospel.”

³⁶ Interview 10.

³⁷ Interview 10.

³⁸ Interview 14; the government tended to overlook the critical role women played in church leadership, focussing instead on identifying and stopping men. Even so, many female leaders were beaten and/or imprisoned at various times, so the risks taken by leaders like Jazarah were real: Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 187-188, 190-191; Lehman, “Aster Debossie,” 22.

go out in the morning and come back at night. I do not choose where I go. I preach to everybody: I don't care what tribe, whether they are priests or prostitutes, on the bus, on the street, anybody I find." She describes the unexpected support she once received from a Derg soldier: "I was distributing tracts at Maskal Square one day, when a man refused the tract I offered him. He was about to strike me when a soldier pointed his gun at the man and said, 'Take it!' I said, 'Please don't do anything to him.' Finally the man was so afraid he took the tract."³⁹

More often, evangelism triggered persecution from authorities. Five police officers, members of MKC, were imprisoned in Dire Dawa for eleven and a half months because they shared the gospel with other officers and soldiers. Because of the risks involved with Christian witness, MKC leaders encouraged believers to be bold but wise in their evangelism, discerning their audience's receptivity to the gospel. An elder working for a government-owned corporation had a personal policy of discussing his faith with individuals but not groups of non-believers.⁴⁰ Others gave testimony to their faith in public settings hostile to evangelical Christianity, such as political indoctrination sessions or to a crowd trying to intimidate them.

One day, the teachers and student body of a local high school were ridiculing evangelical Christians with taunts like, "What has Jesus done for you? Just tell us. List what he has done for you." Although some believing students backed away in fear, student leader Teru seized the opportunity to proclaim the gospel. She and her friend Seble replied, "We can tell you all the things that Jesus has done for us." At the end of the school day, teachers gathered the student body in a courtyard, seating them in a large circle with Teru and Seble in the middle for questioning. Asked for her response, Seble answered, "The Bible says, 'Don't throw your pearls before swine.'" Predictably, students beat her and sent her away. Teru addressed the question, "What has Jesus done for you?" by saying:

I am free from the fear of death and from the fear of hell, where the fire never goes out, where the worm doesn't die. I am free from that kind of fear. I am at peace with myself. I have peace of mind from God.

The second thing that Jesus has done for me is he has given me my family: my mother and my brothers and sisters. After receiving Jesus Christ, I also have a family that loves the Lord, so that is another good gift that I have received from Jesus.

The Lord has also given me the wisdom and the strength to witness to unbelievers like you. I have many brothers and sisters in the Lord. And I want you also to be brothers and sisters, you know.

³⁹ Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*.

⁴⁰ Girma Haile, "The Brief History of Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church," (BA senior paper, Meserete Kristos College, 2002), 13-14; Abera Ertiro, "Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth," 35; Interview 20.

All of you...are listening to me because of what Jesus has done for me, [because] of what he means to me. That's why you are here to listen to me.
In response, a school administrator in charge of discipline told the students: "Don't ever bother

Teru from here on. She has her stand. Don't come and bother her."⁴¹

Clearly, there were complex dynamics at work that shaped the response of authorities and others to the proclamation of the gospel in public contexts. One could not know with certainty whether one would encounter sympathy or hostility. Some MKC leaders presented Christian faith as an alternative to Marxist philosophy in political forums. At an indoctrination session in Nazareth, a cadre listed a series of government actions which he believed would solve problems in the nation. Teru remembers that evangelist Kedir "could not contain himself." He stood up and said, "All these things that you have said are not going to solve the problems of Ethiopia. It is only God who can do it."⁴²

Educated in mathematics, Solomon read Marxist literature as background for writing Christian apologetics material. As a work requirement he needed to attend a week of indoctrination sessions for 350 high school teachers held in Nazareth. Because of a dream about the event ahead of time, he was sure that God wanted him to speak to the assembly. On the first day an academic team of nine commissioned by the Derg led the group in a discussion of form and content, idealism, dialectical materialism, belief and religion. Early in the session Solomon challenged, on philosophical grounds, an assertion by one presenter that content necessarily precedes form. The crowd clapped for him and he sat down.

⁴¹ Interview 8; Teru describes another incident, years later, in which she boldly testified to her faith in Jesus Christ in the face of an attempt to intimidate her. After picking up Bible study materials from the home of a church leader to distribute to other believers in Nazareth, she stepped outside, and walked to the city's main street in the rain. Seeing the mayor of the city, a former teacher who had persecuted her for her faith, she waved to him and said, "Gash Aklelu, please take me in your car. It's raining." Teru explains:

He wasn't really willing. He was sort of hesitant. He knew me to be a strong Christian. He knew me as a student. He was at that place where I had said what Jesus had done for me...So I asked him to give me a lift and he was not really willing, but it was raining. Anyway, I opened the car and entered. He said, "I know where you are going. You are going to recruit people, believers. You are going to recruit." I said, "Yes, I am. But you are also recruiting for your party." So he wasn't happy. He was angry with the way I answered him. He was a very cruel kind of person. I mean he took people and he was suspected of having killed one woman that was against their party. And so he was complaining, and when I reached the place where I was going to distribute the sheets to different homes, I asked him to stop. I opened the car, and he said, "I was going to take you somewhere. Now you are out of my hand." I said, "Yes, you are going to recruit people, but your recruiting is just for a while. My recruiting is until the end of my life. I will continue recruiting for Christ." And he was mad. He was really mad.

⁴² Interview 8; in Interview 9 Louam recounts his experience at an indoctrination session in which he challenged the assault on human dignity he perceived in the Marxist appropriation of evolutionary theory, saying, "I am a human being. I believe that we were created by God." His declaration of faith bolstered the courage of a member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, who voiced his agreement, "I really appreciate what this fellow has said. I also believe that we have been created in the image of God and in his likeness. We are not monkeys."

The presenting team insisted that God does not exist. When an Ethiopian Orthodox teacher began a sentence referring to "the Creator," the assembly laughed at him. About noon, Solomon wanted to address the group. After praying three times to be sure of the Lord's presence and guidance, he asked two questions: "How long has the universe in this form existed?" and "What is matter?" He explains, "I knew what they would say. They tried to answer. But someone said, 'We have not understood the question of this comrade. Why not [have him] explain his question?'"

Solomon stood up and led the group through a series of questions exploring the limits of human perception of matter and exposing contradictions in Marxist thought, making frequent references to communist texts and insights from physics, philosophy and astronomy. At various points, the assembly clapped in agreement. Recognizing the danger of pride, Solomon resisted saying to himself, "I have made it." He clarifies, "If I said that, the Spirit of God would abandon me." After forty-five minutes of discourse, Solomon said, "If you...are prepared, these are my questions...Please give me an answer."

The chairperson asked, "Any answer from the house?" but the group was silent. "Answer from the house?" he repeated. With no response forthcoming, he concluded, "We will come prepared to answer this question" and dismissed the group. As the academic delegation left through a specially designated door, some Catholic teachers followed by mistake and overheard a group member say, "Didn't I tell you that we shouldn't raise this topic? We should start with class struggle, not about idealism and materialism." Another said, "Why did you give that person the second chance? Don't you remember when he asked about content and form? You shouldn't have given him a second chance. He is very scientific but he's an extreme idealist." A third delegation member asked, "Where can we get answers to his questions?" The Catholic teachers had been on the verge of backsliding in their faith, but changed their minds when they heard this conversation. "These people do not have the answer," they realized. It became the talk of the town that "one Pente" had shut the mouths of the indoctrinators.⁴³

⁴³ Interview 18; Solomon's questions went unanswered in future sessions. He later learned that as the delegation ate supper that evening they debated whether he should be arrested. Some said he should be jailed. Others asked, "How can we arrest him? We gave a chance for questions." Because they were divided, Solomon did not suffer negative consequences for his witness.

iv. Missionary initiative

The missionary vision of MKC leaders extended well beyond the boundaries of their own communities. When MKC students and government employees were relocated to other communities through the compulsory Derg zemecha program or workplace transfers, they shared the gospel and organized new congregations based on a cell group structure. Evangelists travelled great distances to encourage scattered church members – often solitary, isolated believers – in their faith and in their evangelistic ministries with neighbours and work colleagues.⁴⁴

Itinerant evangelists were also involved in their own pioneering missionary work, travelling to various communities and sharing their faith in one-to-one conversations with strangers in bus stations, cafeterias and other public places. Kifle describes the vision, commitment and influence of his colleague Tadesse Negewo, who left his job as a government teacher to spread the gospel in new territory, particularly among the Oromo of Wollega: “He...had really hard, hard times...travelling on foot for hundreds of miles, with his feet bleeding and in the kind of wild places where there were lions...but he dared to spread the gospel and that has resulted in bringing thousands of believers to the kingdom. And that commitment has really encouraged me to do the same work, telling the good news, too, wherever I went.”⁴⁵

v. Participating in God’s work

MKC leaders’ expansive vision for evangelism and church growth was grounded in a conviction that bringing people to faith was ultimately *God’s* work. Miracles of healing and guidance from the Holy Spirit reminded them that while they were called to sacrificial service, evangelistic success depended on the sovereign grace of God. Teru remembers that as the church was “increasing greatly in number...there was joy in what God was doing with us and for us.” Dawit observes that prior to the coming of the Derg, MKC was like a single rail line from Addis to Dire Dawa: “But now God spread it all over Ethiopia, from Eritrea, from top to bottom; from east to west...to all four corners...God taught us: if you respect people and serve

⁴⁴ Abera Ertiro, “Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth,” 40; Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 235; Girma Haile, “Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church,” 17; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 198-200; Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Interviews 1, 3, 4, 5, 11, 17, 19 and 22. In Interview 5 evangelist Kifle remembers the inspirational influence of Kedir Delchume, based in Nazareth, especially “his desire to see the church grow and expand - to the east, to the south, everywhere,” explaining that “He sent workers to these places and gave them encouragement, and that has also strengthened my desire to spread the good news and to work for the kingdom of God.”

⁴⁵ Interviews 5, 11, 17 and 19; Interviews 3 and 11 also describe the itinerant work of Tadesse, as well as Kedir Delchume and Alemu Checole.

with good intentions, God will go with you. We [do not] neglect a single person. When we go to reach that person, we plant a church there. That's how the church was planted.”⁴⁶

Selassie describes an unexpected opportunity to share his faith in prison:

...I was amazed at what God did...two [or] three months after we were in prison. It was Easter... The people in there were political people who didn't care about religion and there were Muslims. There were all sorts of kinds of people. And they wanted to celebrate Easter. I was amazed. They asked whether my wife could bring food appropriate for Easter...and they would pay for it...I said, "By faith, yes." And she did. She didn't take their money but she...brought...lots of food, and they said to me, "Would you also be able to tell us what Easter is about?"

Can you imagine? I still praise the Lord. And I took the story of the Passover from the Old Testament. I didn't have a Bible...but I knew the story, and said Jesus our Passover was crucified for our sake. The word "Passover"...Pascha in Amharic is Pasika. It is the same thing...I was able to tell Muslims and all, everybody sitting there, that "Jesus our Pasika is crucified for us.”⁴⁷

Leaders in the Meserete Kristos Church shared the gospel with confidence that God was working through them. Semer explains:

The big result that we wanted to see...was to see many people saved, and brought to Christ. And there was that result...because so many new believers [were] ...witnessing on a one-to-one basis, it brought about a big number of people to be added to the body of believers...So the church was growing and that was one result that we felt God had accomplished through the leaders, through the work of the evangelists and other committed Christians.⁴⁸

An MKC member employed at the mission hospital in Nazareth describes an incident that became a symbol of the church's witness to Christ in the face of persecution. Menoro recalls an order from Derg officials to remove the cross in the hospital chapel:

When the Marxist regime took over, the officials told me they wanted the cross destroyed. Of course, the cross was built into the wall, so it was quite difficult for them to destroy it completely. But they wanted to paint over it, and they asked me as a maintenance person to do this. We painted it and the cross came out even more distinctly. Then we tried another paint, and it still came out distinctly. We tried five times, but it remained visible.⁴⁹

With perseverance and creativity, MKC leaders equipped and led the church in sharing the gospel of Jesus, trusting that message of the cross would not be obscured by persecution.

c. Strengthening the church

Under the ideological and coercive pressure of the Derg regime, MKC leaders devoted themselves to a third shared objective: "to keep the body of Christ strong." Teku places this in the context of a broader

⁴⁶ Interviews 1 and 8.

⁴⁷ Interview 2.

⁴⁸ Interview 15.

⁴⁹ Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*.

spiritual war: “The intent of Satan is to destroy the church. Our intent is...the continuity of the existence of the church of Jesus Christ. We were struggling that we should not die.”⁵⁰ In addition to survival, MKC leaders wanted to see the purposes of God advance and pursued a vision of a church 1) centred on Jesus Christ, 2) on a biblical foundation, 3) persistent in prayer, 4) united, 5) faithful under pressure, 6) holy, and 7) financially healthy. Leaders pursued these goals through the spiritual formation of individual believers and in their guidance of the church as a whole. They carried out this vision at great personal risk through preaching and teaching, the creation of cell groups, study materials, discipleship programs for new believers, personal modelling and mentoring, and regular visits to homes and workplaces.

i. Vision for a strong church

1) Centred on Jesus Christ

As leaders prioritized their own relationship and obedience to Jesus Christ, they worked hard to ensure that MKC as whole lived up to its name: “*The church of which Christ is the foundation.*” Bekele remembers that leaders continually asked: “How do we keep up the members' life with Christ?” Tengene articulates a seamless relation between discipleship and evangelism in MKC understanding and practice: “Throughout my years of service, my main goal was really that people come to know Christ, come to the saving grace of salvation, and for them to grow up in him...I want to see people grow into the likeness of God's Son...”⁵¹

2) On a biblical foundation and 3) Persistent in prayer

For MKC leaders, the faithfulness and strength of the church required that it be built on a biblical foundation and energized by active, tenacious prayer. To “keep the church on firm ground” was to learn and teach the Word of God. Kifle notes that “People have to really strongly grounded in the Word of God, and follow the truth laid down in the Bible.” Speaking both about his personal commitments and vision for the church, Solomon says, “I wanted all the time to be Christ-centred and Word-centred...I wanted [the church] to be a biblically balanced charismatic movement.” Berihun describes the essential role of the Bible for Christian leadership, particularly for building disciples and preparing them for faithful ministry: “The Word of God becomes alive when there is persecution...When we say, ‘leadership,’ we lead people to

⁵⁰ Interviews 12 and 21.

⁵¹ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 134-135; Interviews 22 and 19.

God, to God's Word. That is very important. Training prepares people...[to] be built...and...equipped by the Word of God to reach others.”⁵²

This was coupled with prayer – personal and corporate. In the words of Dawit: “Prayer...became our culture...Without ceasing, we prayed...Everywhere we prayed, prayed, prayed, prayed, prayed.”⁵³

4) Holiness and 5) Unity

Biblical faithfulness and prayer anchored other dimensions of church strength, including holiness and unity. Tengene, for example, wanted “to see the church really rooted in the Word of God” in order “to see a difference from the world,” that God would be “glorified in this church.” Gemechu highlights the role of prayer and fasting in shaping the growth and character of the Meserete Kristos Church: “Church members recall that the more they engaged in prayer and fasting, the more surprising the growth they experienced in both numbers and the quality of holy lives.”⁵⁴

Two Executive Committee members identify unity as a key priority. Solomon had been part of the Nazareth Heavenly Sunshine movement and was influential in leading many of its members into MKC; Hakim had a longer history with MKC dating to his education in Mennonite mission schools. Both describe their role in helping to establish unity between church members from the different historic spiritual streams. MKC leaders also worked toward unity among Christians beyond their denomination. Solomon, who served as chairperson of the Evangelical Church Fellowship of Ethiopia near the end of the Derg era, says, “...my purpose was for the church to remain united. Not only our local church.... I was trying to...bring unity among the evangelical churches.” Like holiness, church unity was safeguarded by a common reliance on Scripture and prayer. Zere asserts: “We wanted to...keep the body of Christ...together...to keep the unity of the church, to strengthen them through the Word of God and through prayer. And the Lord really helped us to be together to the end. Not many of them left the church.”⁵⁵

⁵² Interviews 3, 5, 7, 11, 12, 13 and 18; in Interview 15 “Semer” observes that Bible study and prayer became more firmly embedded in the corporate life of the church under the pressure of persecution:

...we...began to study his Word deeply and prayed together often. Before the coming of the Derg, we of course considered ourselves Christians but we were kind of lukewarm, not really fully committed to God's Word and did not really live according to what was written. But the Derg really made us realize that we had very precious values from the Lord; that our lives for Christ were meant to be precious. The Lord gave us special understanding to stand on his Word to the end.

⁵³ Interview 1; for more on spiritual disciplines, see Section B.3.b “Reliance on God to enable personal faithfulness.”

⁵⁴ Interview 19; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 37.

⁵⁵ Abera Ertiro, “Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth,” 49-50; Interviews 10, 13, 16, 18, 20 and 21.

6) Faithful under pressure

In addition to bridging differences among believers, MKC leaders pursued unity by encouraging believers to persevere in their faith. Jazarah explains: “All our efforts...as leaders were to keep believers in the faith so that they would not stray away...We wanted the church to be a strong church, so that members would not be deceived and taken away from the Lord.”⁵⁶

Keenly aware of those who were struggling, Teru says, “My goal was to strengthen believers who were kind of shaky in their faith, to strengthen them to persist to the end.”⁵⁷ As with holiness and unity, a biblically-based discipleship was essential for believers to withstand the pressures of Marxism. Kifle says, “I wanted to keep God's flock...from going astray. It was so hard for them. I wanted to teach them and ground them firmly on the Word of God and pray with them. So that was one goal that I had: to keep the flock from scattering.”⁵⁸

7) Financially healthy

While subservient to more primary goals, financial viability was another dimension of church strength addressed by MKC leaders. Bedru Hussein explains that the socialist revolution jeopardized the financial health of the church: “In 1975 MKC was in crisis. The Marxist-Leninist government of Ethiopia was threatening to expel all missionaries and threatening to refuse any foreign money from the West. The MKC-affiliated mission, which had been supporting the church since 1948, had been gradually cutting back its funding. But there was no corresponding increase in giving from the churches.”⁵⁹

In response, leaders began to include biblical stewardship teaching – especially the role of tithing – in their discipleship training. They also modelled generous giving and established a system of accountability for handling church finances. As MKC members began to take their tithing commitments

⁵⁶ Interview 14.

⁵⁷ Interview 8; in Interview 2, Selassie describes his desire for “younger people to see the long-lasting value of being a disciple of Jesus as compared to what was happening at the time, that they would grow [from] ...this, and when everything has passed away, they [would be] still standing.”

⁵⁸ Interview 5; in Interview 21 Teku explains: “If a...converted Christian hasn't been grounded by...biblical truth...he or she would abort or backslide. So in order to prevent this, we were struggling to bring [believers] to maturity, Christian maturity, to be true disciples of Jesus Christ...” Others, including Alemu in Interview 10, agree that faithful perseverance depends on a strong grounding in the Bible.

⁵⁹ Bedru Hussein, *Stewardship in the Self-Supporting Church* (Mulwanza, Tanzania: Inland Publishers, 1998), 20, cited by Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 249.

seriously, the church was able to give financial support to families of imprisoned church members, as well as to assist evangelists with some expenses.⁶⁰

ii. Strategies, sacrifice and risk-taking to strengthen the church

The health and strength of the church corporately – its unity, holiness and evangelistic witness – was lodged in the discipleship of believers. Throughout the years of the Derg, leaders worked to strengthen the church through preaching and teaching, the creation of cell groups, study materials, discipleship programs for new believers, personal modelling and mentoring, and regular visits to homes and workplaces. The closure of the church in 1982 eliminated public forums for spiritual formation but became the catalyst for a more enthusiastic embrace of one-to-one and small group ministry.

1) Creating and distributing literature

The Meserete Kristos Church was gifted with intellectual leaders who had a vision for equipping the church with resources for Bible study, discipleship, apologetics and leadership training. Working at night and through school vacations, they produced studies such as “Following Jesus,” used for new believers and as a foundation for further MKC courses. With assistance from friends with access to duplicating equipment and a clandestine distribution network, materials arrived in the hands of evangelists, cell groups and new believers. Berihun, a member of the Evangelism Committee, remembers the challenge – and miracles – involved in transporting training materials from Addis Ababa to its various destinations:

...every road and highway was a checkpoint where the communists checked all possessions a person was carrying... Sometimes we had to pass through many checkpoints with training material ... When we arrived at a checkpoint, we prayed, “Lord, when you were here on earth, you opened blind eyes to see, but now we ask you to blind seeing eyes.” The Lord did this miracle throughout the reign of the Derg.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 249; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 202-203; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 53-54, 73-74, observes that at the time the church was closed, only sixteen members of the Wonji Gefersa church had been giving regular tithes; twenty-five others contributed three to five times a year. Influenced by teaching within cell groups, almost all wage earners began tithing their income to the church; Interviews 2, 3 and 22.

⁶¹ Abera Ertiro, “Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth,” 34; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 189-190; Interviews 1, 3, 8, 9, 10, 12, 18 and 22; in Interview 11 Desta says that her late husband risked transporting contraband material because he wanted to see the church strengthening and the people grounded in the Word of God: “That’s what made him bold to go through those checks.” In Interview 5 Kifle describes the stress of surveillance at checkpoints as well as his gratitude for God’s help to safely move through them.

2) Cell groups

Although it was common for MKC members to gather in small groups for Bible study and prayer in the early years of the Derg, cell groups became essential for discipleship, ministry and leadership formation after the closure of the church. Participation in these groups entailed considerable risk. Each group had its own leadership, supported by elders and evangelists, who made periodic visits to encourage, teach, pray with and equip home gatherings. Because the authorities did not consider Bible teaching to be a legitimate job, evangelists travelling without work permits or identification papers faced possible arrest and imprisonment. To minimize risk, leaders assigned leadership of house fellowships to local people when possible, particularly at times of increased government surveillance. Hosts of cell gatherings faced the danger of betrayal from neighbours, searches or ransacking of their homes by cadres, and arrest. Although some MKC members were afraid to take the risk, many gladly opened their doors.⁶²

The process of adopting a cell-based church structure is discussed in more detail below, but it is worth noting here that MKC leaders and members embraced and prioritized these groups as potent settings for strengthening the church through worship, discipleship, mutual encouragement and challenge.⁶³

3) Visitation

In addition to cell group ministry, research participants emphasize the importance of personal visitation for the discipleship, pastoral care, and support of believers. Bekele explains that “If you care for part of your body that means you are caring for the whole body.”⁶⁴ Elders, evangelists and pastoral care committee members were especially active in home visitation, perhaps stopping to see five or six families

⁶² Interviews 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 17 and 22; Girma Haile, “Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church,” 14; Lehman, “Aster Debossie,” 24. In Interview 15 Semer describes an evening before the closure of the church when authorities arrested him and a group of 15-20 choir members he was hosting. Releasing them the next day, officials warned him that if he was again caught with more than three people in his home who were not part of his family, they might confiscate his property. Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 204-207, includes the testimony of a couple who hosted cell meetings in their home. The husband says, “When we gave our home for an underground church, we were ready to suffer the consequences. We locked all the doors and went ahead. God actually gave us a cover, and I was not afraid.” His wife adds, “We were with the Lord, and the Lord was constantly teaching us.” In Interview 22 Bekele explains that he and his wife opened their home for nine different weekly programs, including children’s Sunday School, women’s fellowship, elder team meetings, prayer group and Bible study. Their neighbours knew they were evangelical Christians, but did not cause problems for them.

⁶³ See Section D.5. “Ministry innovation in changing circumstances.”

⁶⁴ Interview 22; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 37, notes that when the Derg began to disrupt the worship patterns of Wonji Gefersa MKC due to propaganda meeting planned for Sunday morning, church leaders strengthened house-to-house prayer and visitation programs.

on a particular evening to “find out how they were doing,” and teach, counsel and pray with them.⁶⁵ Aware of the stresses of Marxist propaganda and persecution on the morale of believers, leaders wanted to “help others cope with the challenges they were facing” by praying with them and giving them direction from God’s Word. They would visit the sick, comfort the bereaved and give food or other practical assistance to families in need. Some believers were afraid to risk a visit from a church leader, saying “Don’t come to our houses. You will get us into trouble.” They tended to drift from their faith over time. Most church members eagerly welcomed ministry visits. Lema describes both the constraints and blessings of some visits: “We visited people. We went to their office. We were not able to talk about our faith, but when we saw each other, we communicated through the Spirit: ‘A brother came and visited me. I am not alone...So the Spirit of the Lord encouraged my life because of him.’ That gives courage, when we visit each other.”⁶⁶

After the church was closed, Teru made regular visits to believers in the villages surrounding her city. Because they were unable to travel due to surveillance by the authorities, Teru went into the countryside to teach them the Bible and pray with them. She says, “We tried to send women...to women and men to men. Also...for the educated, we sent...educated people. And for those that were impatient... like Peter...we tried to send a person who is patient, and would listen to them and bear with them.”⁶⁷

A number of research participants underscore the value of travelling long distances to visit even a lone disciple of Jesus isolated from others because of a government work assignment. Strengthened in their faith and encouraged to share the gospel with neighbours and work colleagues, these scattered members often formed the nucleus of new congregations that grew out of their witness.⁶⁸

4) Discipleship of new believers

Leaders put high priority on the faith formation of new believers, but cared for them outside the church cell structure until they were baptised. To minimize the risk of spies infiltrating the cell church

⁶⁵ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 76-77; Interviews 5, 6, 9, 10, 14, 17, 19, 21 and 22; Girma Haile, “Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church,” 12-13, describes a unique situation in which an evangelist was allowed to live on church property for ten months after the Derg had seized it; he taught new believers, baptized some and gave pastoral care to those who visited him as guards stood at the entrance to the church compound.

⁶⁶ Interviews 8, 9, 14, 15 and 17; in Interview 5 Kifle describes his work as an itinerant evangelist in a remote rural area. In August 1982, after MKC was closed, while trying to encourage persecuted believers, he himself was arrested and put in prison. Released when a local Christian posted his bail, Kifle stayed in the region for about a month, visiting believers in their homes, saying “Take heart. The devil is just trying to weaken you, trying to create fear, but the Lord who is with you is greater [and] stronger than your enemy the devil.”

⁶⁷ Interview 8.

⁶⁸ Abera Ertiro, “Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth,” 40; Interviews 5, 15, 19 and 22.

network, converts took part in a discipleship program with intensive teaching and screening; for at least six months, they experienced church life within “a shadow underground structure” to facilitate spiritual growth while safeguarding the integrity of the church as a whole. After an initial profession of faith in Jesus Christ, converts would meet regularly with the believer who had shared the gospel with them (or another MKC teacher) to be mentored in the Christian faith. After six months, a year or even two years, when it was clear that a convert’s faith was genuine, he or she would be baptized and introduced to a cell group.⁶⁹

Even former church leaders who returned to the church after a period of inactivity took part in the discipleship process before entering a cell group. A church elder describes a number of former elders who, when the church closed, said “Please, don’t come to us. We want to live our life and ... raise our children. Please don’t come and talk to us.” After cell groups were organized, they saw others flourishing in their faith, and when invited back, wanted to rejoin the church with fresh resolve. The former elders were welcomed as new believers and offered “basic salvation teaching” using the booklet, “Following Jesus.” After engaging in the discipleship formation process, some again became leaders in the church.⁷⁰

Guiding new believers could be complicated by government surveillance. Aware that authorities often followed him and monitored his mail, Fikru Zeleke taught converts while walking with them, giving them Bible verses written on slips of paper. Sometimes he met them in a hotel dining room, praying with eyes open and sharing handwritten Scripture passages with them in the presence of town officials. In 1985, assisted by an itinerant evangelist, Fikru baptized eighteen believers in a government hotel as Derg officials drank on the porch. Those baptized came and left in pairs at twenty-minute intervals.⁷¹

If a new believer belonged to a political party or held a government position, leaders arranged for their faith to be nurtured in a one-to-one discipleship relationship or in a small group with other party members rather than in a regular MKC cell group. Teru explains the need to teach the Bible and pray with wives of politicians “very carefully and secretly...one by one” so that others would not find out about it.

⁶⁹ Interviews 4, 10 and 22; Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 234; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 68; Girma Haile, “Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church,” 16; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 197, 205-208 mentions that a few agents managed to slip past MKC’s screening system, saying and doing the “right” things in order to gather information about the church. Sometimes during an intense prayer meeting, however, as believers prayed for the defeat of Satan, those who came insincerely cried out and experienced a genuine conversion; Lehman, “Aster Debossie,” 24; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 262.

⁷⁰ Interview 1.

⁷¹ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 199-201. The practice of baptism was risky. In Interview 3 Berihun remembers an occasion in Gojjam on which he and two other leaders took a group of converts to a pond for baptism. The sound of water splashes attracted the attention of the authorities; the group scattered but the newly immersed believers were caught and imprisoned.

Church leaders sometimes felt quite vulnerable when a believer carried significant political authority, but those willing to mentor new Christians in this situation are grateful they took the risk.⁷²

5) Example

MKC leaders understood that the effectiveness of their leadership rested on the integrity of their own example, modelling and mentoring. Although discussed in greater detail in Section B below, it is worth noting here that leaders explicitly identify a connection between their personal faithfulness to Jesus Christ and their ability to teach and positively influence others.⁷³

d. Multiplying and equipping leaders

In addition to pursuing personal faithfulness to Jesus, evangelism, and strengthening the church, church leaders were committed to calling and equipping others for ministry, a priority embedded in the culture of MKC from its beginning. They created a number of opportunities for leadership training. In the early stages of the revolution, a number of leaders recognized that Ethiopian socialism was moving to hardline communism. To prepare not only MKC but other Christian denominations for this, they began regular leadership conferences and teaching sessions on the campus of Nazareth Bible Academy, attracting up to a thousand participants from Ethiopian evangelical churches. Leaders were equipped with biblically based teaching on evangelism, socialism, theology and Christian living.⁷⁴

⁷² Interviews 5, 8, 9 and 17; Speaking of three Christians who were party members, Louam admits, "We were a bit frightened by them" and "nobody was willing to teach" them; however, when Kedir asked "What shall we do with so and so and so?" Ebiyu was willing to lead a Bible study group for them.

In Addis Ababa, Lema received an invitation to pray with a Derg official suffering from a chronic digestive illness. When he and a co-leader did so in the man's home, "something happened." Their host said, "I am feeling well." He ate the Ethiopian staple *injera* for the first time in six years and was content. When the healed man expressed interest in Bible study, his family asked Lema if he would be willing to teach him. "He is willing to learn the Word of God," they insisted. Lema agreed, but was shaken when the Derg official insisted on going to Lema's house for study. Driving in the man's car, Lema noticed that police and military officers greeted his student with a particularly respectful salute. After three months of Bible study, Lema saw him on television; he was a general assigned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs! The evangelist explains his fear: "He was big person, you know. After a week, when I saw him, I was not able to teach him, and he asked me, 'What happened to you?'" Lema admitted, "I didn't know who you are, but when I saw a TV last week I was shocked." The general responded, "Don't worry, brother. I am a disciple of Christ." Because of the general's position in the Derg, he was imprisoned when the government fell, but shared his faith in Christ with many in prison. Lema concludes, "God is able to win such people. He knows how to win them."

⁷³ Alemu Checole, "Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa," 249; Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 45; Lehman, "Aster Debossie," 23; Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21.

⁷⁴ Alemu Checole, "Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa," 231-232; Interviews 2, 3, 4, 10, 17, 19 and 20; Berihun, an MKC Evangelism Committee member, explains his top three goals were 1) training leaders, 2) training potential leaders, and 3) equipping members for their ministries.

Gemechu notes that leaders felt a particular need for training in light of the opposition they were experiencing. The *One Month for Christ* program trained high school graduates and sent them to visit believers who were part of the church before its closure to invite them to join an underground fellowship group. In the late 1970s, another program known as *Summer for Christ* and *Three Months for Christ* provided students with a week of discipleship and ministry training and sent them out to preach and teach.⁷⁵

When MKC reorganized after its closure in 1982, the underground cell structure greatly increased the need and opportunity for members to share in the leadership of the church. Not only did each cell group require leadership, there was a multiplication of other ministry roles. In Addis Ababa, for example, there had been seven elders in the local MKC congregation when the church was closed; with the move to small groups, the church divided into six congregations, each of which had seven elders, for a total of forty-two in the city. The number of deacons and preachers grew by the same proportion.⁷⁶

Berihun, an elder in Addis Ababa, describes how the pressing need for calling and equipping new leader weighed heavily on him after the closure the church. He felt greatly relieved after he and others finished training 42 or 47 watchers for leadership in the different regions of the city. He explains: “Before that, we were in fear. What will happen if we are arrested? What would happen to the church? Who would lead? We were three elders and three evangelists left [after the arrests of other key MKC leaders]... Then after God gave us that victory, we started to praise God. We felt, now hereafter, we don't mind.”⁷⁷

To support and equip leaders the church formed a Christian Education Committee which prepared and distributed educational material for cell groups and established clandestine training centres for leaders in Addis Ababa, Nazareth, Metehara and Dire Dawa. Monthly sessions at these centres equipped leaders to form cell groups, train local leaders and address challenges in ministry as they arose.⁷⁸ Over time the Christian Education Committee developed a five year training curriculum for leaders. In addition to

⁷⁵ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 57; Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 234-235; Interviews 1 and 21.

⁷⁶ Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 235; Interviews 3, 17 and 19.

⁷⁷ Interview 3.

⁷⁸ Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 234; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 57; Girma Haile, “Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church,” 14-18. The Christian Education Committee created Bible study guides highlighting relevant themes for the church. For example, a study of 2 Timothy focused on Paul’s instructions for leading persecuted churches, particularly training new leaders, with its theme verse: “What you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well” (2 Timothy 2:2); Interviews 5 and 20.

absorbing content, gatherings were also opportunities for mutual encouragement as leaders from different congregations learned from the experiences of others and prayed together.⁷⁹

Leaders who received training at one of the regional centres returned to their congregations to equip other church members for cell group leadership. Gemechu describes how he and a co-leader chose sixteen local cell leaders, mostly labourers or students, for Wonji Gefersa MKC and led them in eight hours of training per day for a full week. Each newly trained leader gave direction to some of the eighty cell groups formed for the congregation. Hundreds of group leaders across MKC were trained in inductive Bible study and teaching methods.⁸⁰

The Evangelism Committee also led training seminars for recent university graduates to equip them for evangelism, discipleship and church planting before they moved to work assignments in different parts of the country. To prepare evangelists for full-time ministry, they created a *One Year for Christ* program that offered a series of courses interspersed with ministry assignments. In addition, youth leaders, elders, teachers and evangelists took part in *Key Teacher's Training* program sessions every two or three months, focussed on developing leadership and management skills, including effective team work and group decision-making processes. In addition to offering training in their home communities, Evangelism Committee members went to remote places to support and equip leaders, often travelling the whole day and meeting all night in homes, hotels or wooded areas.⁸¹

An apprenticeship model was commonly used for training elders and evangelists. Two leaders describe how, after their baptisms in the early years of the Derg, they took part in discipleship and

⁷⁹ Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 58-60, 70, describes a typical week at one of the regional training centres for a group of leaders preparing to equip others in the own congregation for cell group leadership:

The pattern was one of training continuously for eight hours per day in different classrooms. This orientation included different subjects outlined in booklets. "Following Jesus" consisted of ten sessions. "How to lead cell groups" had two sessions. "How to lead Bible study" took three sessions, and "Faithful Servant," an inductive Bible study of the epistle of 2 Timothy had five sessions. "The Epistle to the Ephesians" extended through ten of these teaching sessions. Training was strongly practical in its instruction for individual and corporate living. There was a strong emphasis upon living a new life of purity and separation from the world, a life worthy of the Christians' calling. After one week of classroom instruction, the focus shifted to field education. For this component, trainees were sent back to their congregations and home communities where they began to organize and lead cell groups.

⁸⁰ Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 60, 65-66, notes how he and his co-elders initially attended cell meetings, but when they learned that the local kebele had them under surveillance, they limited themselves to hosting cell group leaders in their homes for additional training. Newly trained cell leaders did not attract the same attention from local authorities; Girma Haile, "Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church," 16, notes that in Dire Dawa, the Roman Catholic Church provided space for MKC leadership training; Interviews 1, 8, 9 and 11; in Interview 3, a member of the MKC Evangelism Committee sums up their leadership training strategy as "We trained the trainers and the trainers would train other trainers."

⁸¹ Interviews 1, 3, 6, 12, 17, 20 and 21. .

leadership courses; then in preparation for serving as elders they spent time as observers on an elder team, gaining first-hand experience of group discussions, decision-making and how assignments were given to team members.⁸²

The calling of leaders was anchored in an understanding that all believers have received gifts for ministry. Gemechu writes about MKC leaders' concern "to fan to flame the gifts of God within each church member." Within cell groups, leaders "not only ministered to believers, but also equipped them to minister to each other," helping others discover and use their spiritual gifts "to build up God's people" and express "God's love to others."⁸³ Even so, not all were called to official leadership positions in the church. What qualities did MKC leaders look for in potential leaders? Interviewees emphasize the importance of character, particularly the need for leaders to lead an exemplary life, although they also required certain leadership competencies.⁸⁴

Gemechu identifies qualities that MKC wanted to see in those who entered leadership training, including 1) a reputation for faithfulness and loyalty to their families, to the church, and to Christ, 2) holiness in daily life and work, 3) a deep concern for lost souls, 4) the ability to keep confidences, 5) perseverance under persecution, 6) generosity with spiritual gifts, time and finances, and 7) effectiveness in teaching others what they have learned.⁸⁵ Bekele describes the gift of discernment he observed among senior MKC leaders in their work of calling leaders:

They were watching carefully, discerning carefully, and they said, "This brother; you know, I think he should not serve. He cannot go through this; let's keep him somewhere [else]." ...There were many, many young people who used to say, "Oh, I want like to serve the Lord [in full-time ministry]." The church would say, "No. Go to university. Go, look for a job." We didn't see favoritism; nobody was...favouring his brother or sister or his ethnic group or that kind of thing. Everyone was really committed to the Lord.⁸⁶

⁸² Interviews 9 and 13; in Interview 17, an evangelist describes his early ministry formation working with a more experienced evangelist.

⁸³ Gemechu Gebre Telila, "History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 55, 70.

⁸⁴ Alemu Checole, "Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa," 249; Lehman, "Aster Debossie," 23; Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21; Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 45, 59, describes sending a church member with a solid reputation for Christian faithfulness for leadership training, but the man proved unable to organize cell groups according to plan. "Other leaders perceived that he lacked the courage and decisiveness to train cell group leaders."

⁸⁵ Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 56-59, 77; in Interview 9, another leader refers to the importance of meeting the leadership criteria identified in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, highlighting the need for an elder to have a Christian family and adding the importance of faithfulness in tithing.

⁸⁶ Interview 22; in Interview 1 Dawit says that Kedir "had a good eye to pick leaders from among the Christians."

Remembering his own call, Teku describes how MKC leaders identified leadership potential in him as a student. Eager to grow in his faith, when Teku came across a touching portion of the Bible or other Christian literature, he would memorize it and talk about it with others who would raise questions and discuss it with him. In that way, he says, “I experienced how to lead...people,” individually and in groups. As he grew in his character and abilities, church leaders offered him greater leadership responsibilities.⁸⁷

Although Ethiopian cultures tend to view leadership as a male domain, MKC came to increasingly recognize and rely on the leadership gifts of women during the oppression of the Derg years. About two-thirds of cell groups were led by women; a few also served as elders; many served as prayer group leaders, Sunday School teachers, pastoral care givers, exercised gifts of preaching, teaching, evangelism, discipleship and marshalling practical support for prisoners and others in need. Gemechu observes that:

During the time that the church was under duress...the roles that women filled expanded significantly. Their...loyalty and courage elevated them as role models, and the need for persons to care for others opened many situations to their ministry. The church maintained that in Christ a perfect spiritual equality exists between men and women as heirs of God's grace. There was little attention to the question of authority defined by gender. Rather, the focus was upon designating those who could minister.⁸⁸

The multiplication and training of leaders became an essential part of MKC strategy. Bekele notes that the MKC emphasis on calling, equipping and mentoring others into leadership is counter-cultural, but necessary. Describing a cultural tendency to see leadership authority as a scarce resource to defend rather than share with others, he identifies a common pattern in which leaders try to retain power for life. Instead, however, he argues that “a leader has to have a heart that brings other people to the leadership position...He should not think he is the only leader there. If a leader does not have someone behind him...he is not a leader for me. He has to have disciples behind him who can take over his ministry.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Interview 21; Teku also mentions specific occasions when more mature leaders gave him invaluable guidance: 1) when elected to serve in a choir, they cautioned him not to overextend himself, encouraging him to focus on his leadership responsibilities in the youth program, and 2) gently, but persistently confronting his tendency to over-spiritualize his devotion to Jesus to the exclusion of secular education and work; later they provided funds for his education at Nazareth Bible Academy.

⁸⁸ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 77; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 190, 233; Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 261-262; Lehman, “Aster Debossie,” explores the leadership contributions of MKC women in the context of traditional Ethiopian culture, the sixteenth century Anabaptist movement, missionary praxis and the challenges of the Derg era. In Interviews 2 and 22 Selassie and Mekonnen also express admiration for the leadership contributions of MKC women. Even so, there were differing views in MKC about what leadership roles were appropriate for women. Whereas one female interviewee, Jazarah (Interview 14), served as an elder, Teru (Interview 8) declined her own election to eldership based on her understanding of biblical teaching. She did, however, actively exercise leadership gifts in other ways.

⁸⁹ Interview 22; The priority of preparing others for leadership is also clearly expressed by a woman involved in children’s ministry, speaking shortly after the fall of the Derg in Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*: “The Lord loves

e. The kingdom and glory of God

Animating other objectives like personal faithfulness to Jesus Christ, evangelism, strengthening the church, and multiplying leaders was a longing to see the kingdom of God expand and for God to receive glory. Leaders commonly describe their work as “for the kingdom of God” which they wanted to see “continue to grow.” Nyala says, “I used to pray a lot about...the expansion and the growth of the kingdom of God, even soon after I was converted to the Christian faith.”⁹⁰

For Teru, a Christian leader needs “to always set before him the honour and the glory of God... It's just God who should be glorified and honoured...not politicians...not self-glorification.” Tengene says that his purpose is “to see God glorified,” particularly through the holiness of a church rooted in the Word of God. Kedir is remembered for being “very specific and meticulous about things being done properly and according to the will of God” and ensuring that those for whom he was responsible carried out their responsibilities “faithfully to the glory of God.” Lema understands evangelism as “bringing people to Christ in order to glorify him” and Abebech expresses her desire for the church to grow and be “a witness to the glory of God.” Dawit points out that the persecution was ultimately directed against God, “who rules everyone from the throne” and who manifested his glory by multiplying his people.⁹¹

Some MKC leaders highlight the insignificance of their experience of inconvenience and hardship in relation to the glory of God. Reflecting on choir ministry, Abebech remembers happily travelling long distances to sing “because it was the Lord’s work.” Hosting nineteen choir members in her home required them to “sit on top of each other on our sofas” which were “broken and really sagged” through so much heavy use. Even so, she says, “we were happy because the Lord was using our facilities, our house, for his glory.” Amid the busyness and fatigue of much traffic in and out of her home, Nyala was also sustained by the joy of knowing that God was using her, her husband and their property for his glory. Alemu gives thanks for his blindness, because it opened up opportunities for Christian leadership. Smiling, he recounts the sympathy nonbelievers extended to him “as a physically handicapped person,” clarifying that, “The tradition is that people are sorry for ‘blind guy’ and they wouldn't really arrest me and put me in prison. So

these children: “Tomorrow they’ll be the leaders and I want to bring them on the right path so that they will be capable leaders.” Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 235, observes that, “The persecution...helped produce a good number of committed leaders. Although the church lost some of its key leaders because they were jailed, it managed to identify multiple leaders in spite of all the difficult circumstances.”

⁹⁰ Abera Ertiro, “Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth,” 34; Interviews 2, 12, 15, 16, 17 and 19.

⁹¹ Interviews 8, 19, 12, 17, 10 and 1.

I was always officiating at weddings and at funerals...I was the one to preach...So I think in a way I am thankful to God, even though I am blind I was able to give service in difficult times and I think God used my handicap for his glory.”⁹²

Berihun’s description of the Evangelism Committee aptly summarizes the motivation of the larger pool of MKC leaders: “Each of us was ready to do anything, any time for the glory of God.” He adds, “It is completely essential to turn to God and seek his face and wait for his guidance. Persecution is a means [by which] God reveals himself to the ones who are persecuted and the ones who need his salvation. He guides his children in a way that they would glorify him.”⁹³

B. Integrity: Standing firm under pressure

Quinn observes that people tend to be externally directed as they interact with transactional realities of normal human behaviour, defining themselves by how they believe others perceive them and conforming to others’ expectations in order to gain valued resources. This naturally leads to increasing rifts in personal integrity. Transformational leadership, in contrast, is undergirded by willingness to examine one’s own hypocrisy and seek ever-increasing levels of personal and collective integrity, closing gaps between one’s values and behaviour. The sixth interview question explores internal direction among MKC leaders, acknowledging that persecution pressures leaders to compromise their faith and values and asking, “What kind of pressure did you experience? How did you battle temptation to compromise your faith?” Reflections about pressure and integrity also emerge in other interview segments and sources. This section identifies and explores 1) forms of pressure experienced by MKC leaders during the Derg, 2) the impact on leaders’ internal state, 3) faithfulness to Jesus Christ, 4) dynamics of personal integrity in response to persecution, 5) self-leadership, and 6) persecution as a crucible for spiritual formation.

1. Forms of pressure experienced by MKC leaders during the Derg

Meserete Kristos Church leaders experienced various forms of external pressure to compromise their call and abandon their faith during Ethiopia’s revolutionary years, including a) socialist propaganda in mandatory public forums, b) ridicule, harassment and social ostracism, c) threats and hostile mobs, d) false accusations, e) economic inducements to reject evangelical Christianity, f) confiscation of property, g)

⁹² Interviews 10 and 12.

⁹³ Interview 3.

pressure from former Christians, h) surveillance, i) restrictions on ministry, j) military conscription of young people, k) physical beatings, arrest and imprisonment, l) interrogation, and m) rumours – all of which were expressions of n) an oppressive political, social and spiritual climate.

a. Propaganda and indoctrination

As the ideology of the Ethiopian revolution became more firmly entrenched, the Derg and its supporters wanted all sectors of society to understand and embrace Marxism. Although government propaganda was regularly broadcast on radio and television, MKC members and leaders experienced its pressure mostly directly in local political meetings. Especially concerned about the loyalty of young people, the Derg required everyone aged thirteen to thirty to attend indoctrination sessions at school or kebele headquarters several times a week. In addition, mandatory community organizations for women, youth, and workers gave every demographic group ample opportunity for exposure to Marxist rhetoric.⁹⁴

Yacob remembers that ideological teaching became increasingly hostile toward evangelical Christianity as it expanded from socialist visions for a just society to explicit advocacy for evolutionary theory and atheism. Derg officials used social pressure to coerce citizens into public expressions of support for Ethiopian socialism, particularly through repetitious public shouting – with left arms raised – of revolutionary slogans such as: “Ethiopia first!” “Down with imperialism!” “The revolution is above everything!” “Religion is drugging the masses!” “Long live socialism!” “Down with the bourgeois!” and “Down with our enemies!”⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Abera Ertiro, “Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth,” 35; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 177-178; Interviews 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14, 17, 18 and 20; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 30, 36-38, 89; Lehman, “Aster Debossie,” 29-30. Workers were required to attend a monthly three-hour ideological “awakening” program at their work place during regular working hours. Dawit observes that community organizations tended to define group interests over against others: women against men, young against old. Indoctrination groups for children and youth caused considerable stress for Christian parents. Although children spent most of their time around home or in school before the revolution, these sessions could require their presence from the end of the school day until 10:00 p.m. Parents feared that these classes would teach “children to despise religion as anti-Communist and not to trust their own parents.” If a child’s behaviour did not satisfy kebele officials, he or she could be placed in an indoctrination camp for a week or more.

⁹⁵ Interview 1, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18 and 21; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 174-175; Lehman, “Aster Debossie,” 1; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 25-26, 33, notes that some in the Women’s Association portrayed the Bible as a tool for the oppression of women; Jazarah remembers: “The greatest challenge in those days was the atheism that God doesn’t exist. That was what was preached everywhere, at every meeting. They said, ‘Its foolishness [what] Christianity teaches. It’s the opiate of the people.’” Dawit mentions that Derg officials in Addis Ababa also tried to co-opt MKC choirs by unsuccessfully pressuring them to add communist songs to their repertoire.

b. Ridicule and social ostracism

Evangelical Christian leaders regularly faced ridicule, harassment and social ostracism.

Interviewees describe being “despised,” “ridiculed,” suffering “insult and humiliation,” and being “counted like a second-class citizens” because of their faith. Derided as “Pentes” and followers of a foreign religion, they were dubbed “anti-socialist,” “stupid,” “worthless,” “haters of civilization” and “wicked.”⁹⁶

Mandatory political meetings and indoctrination sessions were common settings to malign evangelical Christians. According to Gemechu, “Communist cadres and authorities insulted and mocked Christians to humiliate them. They attempted to force believers to participate in such activities as chanting slogans or drinking intoxicating beverages which would violate the Christians' convictions. Given the Christians' refusal to participate, the communists portrayed them as not being loyal citizens of the country.”

Considering the social and political marginalization of evangelical Christians in revolutionary Ethiopia, it is unsurprising that they were often ostracized at school, work and other settings. When Amha, who formerly persecuted Christians, embraced faith in Jesus, his peers “quickly noticed the change and forced him out of their circle of friends.”⁹⁷

c. Harassment, threats and hostile mobs

Ridicule and social ostracism often escalated to sustained harassment, threats and attempts to intimidate MKC members and leaders into renouncing or compromising their faith and ministry. Cadres harassed anyone perceived to be less-than-supportive of the revolution. Making armed visits to MKC church property, schools, leaders' homes and workplaces, they would verbally abuse leaders, often

⁹⁶ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” pp.34, 40-41, 53, 89, 92, observes that MKC members were scorned as “haters of civilization” because they refused to take part in communist festivals that included drinking alcohol and dancing; Interviews 2, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 22. In Interview 12, Nyala remembers that while working at a garment factory, ridiculed her for her faith, saying, “You are foolish. How do you know that God exists? This is really not scientific.” Gemechu recounts that when Wonji Gefersa MKC was closed on January 30, 1982 kebele officials and guards found evangelist Debebe G/Tsadik in a side room, kneeling in prayer. Debebe explains that when he heard the noise of crowds outside:

I thought that the youngsters were coming to pray as they usually do. But then the voices I heard were completely different...demanding and ridiculing with boisterous laughing...the voices came nearer, and suddenly the door was opened forcefully. I was still on my knees in prayer. There was mockery aimed [at] me and one of the militia grabbed me by my hair. When I stood up all of them sneered and chased me out of the room.

⁹⁷ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 30, 50-53, 89-90; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 178; Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Interviews 1 and 11; Interview 17 mentions the use of megaphones to amplify condemnations of evangelical Christians.

threatening to confiscate their property, beat, imprison or execute them.⁹⁸ Not only cadres, but neighbours, co-workers and fellow students would bully evangelical Christians.⁹⁹ It was particularly frightening when threats were delivered by a hostile mob. Tengene describes two different confrontations with mobs in a community cemetery. On one occasion, 800 people who opposed the burial of an MKC child forced grieving believers to exhume the body; another time Tengene was beaten.¹⁰⁰

d. False accusations

MKC leaders faced various false accusations because of their Christian faith and work. Being a “stooge of imperialism,” working for the American Central Intelligence Agency or sheltering Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party members were common allegations. Individuals were also wrongly accused of possessing firearms, teaching Christianity through the use of music in English classes and arson.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 25-28, 89, notes that anyone who did not speak the language of Marxism was under suspicion. Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 172-173; Interviews 9, 11 and 15; Interview 2 refers to threats coming via anonymous phone calls. In Interview 13 Zere describes a warning he received during the Red Terror, when a revolutionary guard, a former friend, told him, “It has been decided to arrest you and...to execute you because you are like the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party... You are polluting the minds of people. You are working against the ideology we are proclaiming... Stop your activities. Otherwise you will be in deep trouble.” He adds, “They were trying to scare us. They were threatening, but we never stopped God’s work... We continued and the Lord’s protection was with us...” Other leaders also describe being threatened with death if they did not join the Derg political party: Gemechu (46) and Interview 19.

⁹⁹ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 38-39, 53; In Interview 10 Alemu mentions striking students from a local high school throwing stones into the Nazareth Bible Academy compound to frighten the school into cancelling classes. In Interview 22 Bekele remembers that before the church was closed, EPRP supporters regularly came to the local MKC building, threatening: “The day will come that we will put our flags on this church and you people... will be killed.” Christian parents were especially disturbed that their children were bullied by teachers and fellow students because of their faith. In Interview 1 Dawit recalls that “Most of the Christian children suffered more than their parents. It was painful having to see that.” Gemechu and Interview 22 also address the pain of Christian parents unable to protect their children from “sloganeering” and ridicule on account of their faith.

¹⁰⁰ Interview 19; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 25-28, tells the story of two evangelical university students (including Tasisa Esthetu from MKC) at a zemecha campaign camp in Bale province. At a meeting one evening, the camp leader announced that there were anti-revolutionary elements present and reminded the group of their obligation to eliminate enemies. After his speech, zemecha participants encircled the two young believers. Chanting slogans and raising their left fists, they shouted, “Let Ethiopia be the greatest!” “Long live socialism!” “Down with our enemies!” Picking up stones and long sharp poles, the mob ran toward them, acting like “they would stone and crush the two Christians to the dust.” The zemecha leader quieted the group, urging them to give the believers one more chance to renounce their faith: “Let them think the matter over during the night.” When a plot to kill the Christians was uncovered overnight, they were taken to Addis Ababa, and then to prison.

¹⁰¹ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 35, 43, 50-51, 89; Interviews 1, 4, 10, 14, 16, 19 and 22; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 24, describes the unfortunate government confiscation of old correspondence from Eastern Mennonite Missions which referred to an MKC loan account with Church Investment Associates as “CIA.” Derg officials insisted this was proof that MKC had political connections with the American government. Workinesh Bantiwalu spent three days in jail when wrongly accused of having a pistol. In response to the accusation she insisted, “My only weapon in the Bible,” to which the authorities said, “We are not saying to turn over your weapon if you have a pistol; we are saying that you have one.” Workinesh replied, “I don’t protect myself; God is the one who protects me.” Alemu’s high school faculty colleagues were jealous of his popularity with students, claimed that his unorthodox use of music in English class was a pretext for teaching Christianity and wanted him arrested. In the summer of 1982, fires began to break out in fields of standing sugar cane in Wonji. When authorities were unable to discover the culprits, they publicly accused MKC members of arson in retaliation for the recent closure of the church

e. Economic inducements to reject evangelical Christianity

In the political and economic climate of the Derg regime, one's material position was closely tied to one's enthusiasm for the revolution and readiness to renounce evangelical Christianity. On the job, pay raises and promotions went to those clearly committed to the government and its programme. Tewodros notes that Derg representatives sometimes offered Christians a coveted position, benefits, gifts or money to persuade them to join the party. Although some did forsake their faith in pursuit of upward mobility, many accepted demotion or job loss rather than affiliate with an atheistic party.¹⁰²

f. Confiscation of property

The Meserete Kristos Church lost most of its material assets with the appropriation of its schools, medical clinics, hospital, bookstores, denominational headquarters, congregational buildings and bank accounts. Church leaders also experienced the confiscation or destruction of their personal property – such as tape recorders or Bibles – during house searches or when arrested by the authorities.¹⁰³

g. Pressure from former Christians

Former church members were well placed to cause trouble for MKC. Leaders note that cadres with previous MKC experience knew the church, its faith, its leaders and where they lived. They were often sent as “friends” to proselytize Christians for the Derg party and “really caused trouble” for the church. With

and its loss of property; Christians were ostracized in their workplaces and schools; church leaders were put under special security watch; some were eventually jailed until the real perpetrators were found; in Interview 6 Tewodros describes his fifteen day imprisonment as a result of sugar cane arson accusations; in Interview 14, Jazarah describes one of her son's four and a half month imprisonment for the same reason.

¹⁰² Interviews 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 18; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 51-53, notes that workplace political meetings known as *wiyiyit kebeb* not only promoted communist ideology but exposed the degree of employees' commitment to the regime. After twenty-two years as director of the Wonji MKC school, Zinna was offered a better position if he accepted party membership. When he refused, he was demoted and transferred to a remote rural school. Access to housing was also a challenge for some evangelical leaders. In Interview 20, Mamo explains that after a job transfer, he received individual lodging in a new community, but his wife and children had to wait two years to join him. “If I were a member of the Derg, they would [have] immediately [given] me a house,” he says. Interview 10: Alemu and Abebech lost their home when the Derg confiscated the campus of Nazareth Bible Academy. While temporarily living with family in a neighbouring community, the couple regularly visited different kebele offices in Nazareth, seeking permission to rent a house in each jurisdiction. Whenever they asked about a specific home, officials explained why it should go to someone else – often a cadre moving from another community. Finally, after sympathetic people on one kebele committee advocated for them, they were offered “a house that cadres wouldn't really envy having” – two rooms without a toilet. They received this treatment because they were Pentes, Alemu says. In Interview 14, Jazarah mentions that she had two houses confiscated, not because she was an evangelical Christian, but as a landowner with more property than she needed for family; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 179-180, refers to the experience of evangelist Ijigu Woldegebriel who was banished from his kebele.

¹⁰³ Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 232-233; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 25-28, 41-43, 51, 72; Girma Haile, “Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church,” 12, notes that kebele officials created an exhaustive inventory of items seized from one local MKC building, including furniture, Bibles, musical instruments and office equipment; Interviews 7 and 22.

their own promotion in the party dependent on their effectiveness in recruiting, former church members often approached evangelical Christians “in a friendly manner” but “could become even more cruel and merciless than...other cadres.” Believers felt especially betrayed by such behaviour.¹⁰⁴

h. Surveillance and searches

Evangelical church leaders lived under the pressure of surveillance and searches by kebele agents and other Derg loyalists. Some interviewees describe Derg reconnaissance and searches of their homes. The home of one evangelist was “always under surveillance.” When cadres learned that church leaders regularly met at one elder’s home, “they were always looking...to catch them.” Living on the campus of Nazareth Bible Academy for a few months after the closure of MKC, Alemu and his family knew that spies were outside the house, listening for phone conversations with missionaries or other suspicious people. Derg officers limited the family further by preventing friends from entering the compound.¹⁰⁵ MKC leaders were also under scrutiny in their workplaces, neighbourhoods and when travelling. Government security forces could monitor their mail or have them followed. On the road their vehicle could be stopped and searched at checkpoints or by officers on patrol. A Derg regulation obligated anyone in an urban centre to report strangers in the community to security forces.¹⁰⁶ Before the closure of the church, government agents attended MKC worship services, particularly in Addis Ababa, observing the proceedings and who was in attendance. Later, Derg spies attempted to infiltrate the church’s cell structure.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Interviews 6, 12, 20 and 22; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 39-40, 46; in Interview 22 Bekele says that former Christians “became cadres for the government...they were picking the Christians...and beating them...That was really very painful.”

¹⁰⁵ Interviews 12, 15 and 10; In Interview 6, Tewodros says that around the factories of the Wonji Sugar Plantation “people lived very close to each other” so the cadres “followed every movement” of MKC leaders; Interviews 3, 8, 17, 20 and 22 also describe home surveillance and searches; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 22-23, 203-205, mentions that when one leader was arrested in January 1982 many believers came to his home to support his wife; mixed among them were government agents seeking information about the family’s connections. He also notes that for several years, guards were assigned six-hour shifts around the clock at Yohannes Germamo’s house to assure that he did not carry on any religious activity. In Interview 7 Yacob recounts an incident in which a believer’s nephew informed the authorities that MKC believers were sharing the Lord’s Supper and washing each other’s feet (following the example of Jesus in John 13) in his house.

¹⁰⁶ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 50-51; Girma Haile, “Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church,” 14; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 199-200; Interviews 2, 3, 5, 8, 11 and 18. In Interview 15 Semer describes the “nagging” and “pestering” of constant surveillance: “what you do in your house, when you go out to work: they were always following us as Christians.” Even so, surveillance by government agents did not always result in a negative outcome. In Interview 16 Hakim testifies that he was spared execution because an informant in his prison – with whom he regularly played checkers – assured authorities that he did work for the CIA but practiced his faith without opposing the revolution.

¹⁰⁷ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 170-171, 207-208; Interviews 2 and 3; in Interview 17 Melaku describes the challenge and stress of keeping knowledge about church leadership and ministry locations from government informants in order to protect the integrity of the cell structure and its participants.

i. Ministry restrictions and interference

Various Derg restrictions interfered with MKC ministry. Beginning in 1977, no more than five unrelated people could gather without permission from local officials. Believers could not carry a Bible in public. Anyone younger than thirty years of age was prohibited from attending church meetings, including worship. In Wonji Gefersa, kebele officials used the MKC property for political meetings on Sunday mornings. Indoctrination sessions in Addis Ababa and Nazareth were not held on church premises, but were scheduled to interfere with Sunday worship. Security bureau gave some individuals orders to refrain from preaching or taking part in any religious activity. The legal parameters for MKC work and witness became even more constrained in 1982 when the church was outlawed and banned from any public ministry. At that time, limits for assembly were tightened further; two or more people who sat together repeatedly in the same place were considered threats to the revolution.¹⁰⁸

j. Military conscription of young people

Although not the result of religious discrimination, the military conscription of teenagers as young as fifteen years old put additional pressure on the MKC community. Three interviewees describe the stress on families when military recruiters came to their homes to force young men to join the army's fight against Eritrean, Tigrean and other Derg opponents.¹⁰⁹

k. Beatings, arrest and imprisonment

Seventeen research participants speak about personal experience with arrests and imprisonment. In some cases detention lasted only a few hours, overnight or three days; others were incarcerated for several months, a year, or four and a half years at a time. Of interviewees who did not spend time in custody, most were threatened with jail at some point and describe the experience of imprisoned friends and colleagues. Although conditions varied, Ethiopian prisons were often cramped with poor air quality and inadequate rations of food and water; family and friends were expected to supplement prisoners' meagre fare. Eleven

¹⁰⁸ Abera Ertiro, "Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth," 49-50; Alemu Checole, "Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa," 230-234; Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 37, 41-43, 53-55; Girma Haile, "Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church," 12-13; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 27, 168, 171-177, 193; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 259-260; Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 17.

¹⁰⁹ Interviews 13, 14, and 15.

participants mention themselves, a husband or friend receiving death threats. Seven described getting beaten for their faith; another was threatened with torture.¹¹⁰

l. Interrogation

Arrests were usually accompanied by interrogations lasting three, four or ten hours in which MKC leaders were questioned about their beliefs, their commitment to the revolution and pressured them to abandon their faith and/or limit their ministries. In some cases, they also pressed them for information about other leaders, the church and its activities. One arrested leader was given two booklets about socialism and told, "You read this and you be ready. We are going to come in the evening to ask you questions about...Marxism."¹¹¹

m. Rumours

In the context of persecution, rumours about possible actions against church leaders carried real weight and added to the pressure on them and their families. Several interviewees describe the impact of rumours, giving examples of an elder who gave up his ministry over the prospect of arrest, an evangelist who left the church because of speculation that full-time church workers would be pressed into forced labour, and an elder who wrapped Bibles, teaching materials and two guitars in cloth and plastic, and buried them in his backyard for three weeks in response to rumours of an impending search.¹¹²

n. An oppressive political, social and spiritual climate

These various pressures were expressions of an oppressive political, social and spiritual climate. Zere reflects on the challenge of living under conditions in which evangelical Christianity was under attack, stating, "The greatest challenge in those days was the administrative machinery of the Derg. It was so cumbersome: no freedom, no rights that you considered were yours...The government was always agitating

¹¹⁰ Interviews 1-22; Alemu Checole, "Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa," 231-232; Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 25-47; Girma Haile, "Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church," 13-14; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 17-29, 172-192; Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Kassa Agafari, "A Story of Perseverance in Ethiopia," *Canadian Mennonite*, 3, no. 1 (October 25, 1999): 17-19.; Lehman, "Aster Debossie," 1-3, 17-18, 22-25; Jewel Showalter, "'Like Grains of Wheat in the Ground': Ethiopian Mennonites Have Faced Trials and Triumphs in their 50 years," *The Mennonite*, 5, no. 4 (February 19, 2002): 22-23. Hostetler and Hege describe the experience of Shamsudin Abdo, who spent 20 months in a windowless cell, less than sixteen square metres, with over thirty other prisoners who sat, ate and slept on the floor. At night they slept alternating head to feet, so tightly crowded that they needed permission from their whole row to turn from one side to the other.

¹¹¹ Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 24-27, 172-174, 187-188, 200-201; Interviews 9, 13, 16 and 20.

¹¹² Interviews 5, 10, 12 and 15.

the cadres and the authorities from the higher to the lowest echelons...against Christianity, trying to indoctrinate everybody...always trying to belittle the Christian faith.” Leaders do not explain the pressure of persecution only in terms of humanly created structures; evangelist Lema describes his perception of spiritual darkness in this era: “Even in the morning when you go out, even the air, the spirit is not good... You feel it; how it is bad... You sense something. For us, as a Christian, we know we have a shelter; God will protect us. But when you see that death is hovering in the city, you feel that.”¹¹³

2. The impact of external pressures on leaders’ internal state

Persecution naturally had an impact on the internal state of Meserete Kristos Church leaders, who identify common emotions evoked by mistreatment on account of their faith. Almost all sources refer to fear and the need to overcome it in order to be faithful to Jesus. Alemu, for example, acknowledges that “rumours can cause you to be a bit shaken and frightened.” Berihun says that when MKC was closed in 1982, the church was “gripped in fear.” The pervasiveness of persecution caused some leaders to fear neighbours and even friends. Although a common and natural response to threat, fear was recognized as an obstacle to effective leadership that needed to be conquered. Tenge observes that if a leader is “a fearful and wavering person, he cannot really stand the pressure from outside.” Ijigu Woldegebriel asserts, “When we fear persecution, the growth of the church is stunted.”¹¹⁴

Leaders describe their anxiety and worry, particularly for the provision and safety of family members. Parents were troubled by the potential impacts of propaganda and ridicule on their children. Imprisoned leaders and their families were anxious about each other’s well-being. Spouses worried that their partner would suffer while on a ministry assignment.¹¹⁵

Leaders experienced sadness due to various losses. They grieved their inability to maintain close fellowship with missionaries with whom they “felt like one family.” They missed large-group worship gatherings, mourned for former Christians who abandoned their faith, felt the absence of a gifted leader

¹¹³ Interviews 13 and 17.

¹¹⁴ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 38-40, 44-49, 63-64, 71; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 174-175, 179, 195-197, 204-205; Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Kassa Agafari, “A Story of Perseverance,” 17-19; Showalter, “Like Grains of Wheat,” 22-23; Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20.

¹¹⁵ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 38-39; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 24-26; Lehman, “Aster Debossie,” 29-30; Showalter, “Like Grains of Wheat,” 22-23; Interviews 1, 2, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20.

who moved to the United States, and sorrow over the closure of the church. Some lamented the lack of opportunity for further education or the injustice of being denied well-paying jobs or promotions.¹¹⁶

At times persecution left leaders feeling angry, hurt, betrayed, uncertain, confused, insecure, lonely, frustrated, discouraged, overwhelmed, and even embarrassed. Selassie notes that as external pressure on the church escalates, “all sorts of things happen. It’s unpredictable.” It caused Kelile to feel “really bewildered.” Berihun confesses that when the church was closed, “we didn’t know what to do.” When the rest of their church leadership team either re-located to other communities or abandoned their ministries, Gemechu and a co-elder “questioned whether they were capable or significant enough to stand up to the challenges facing the church.” They asked themselves how they could lead successfully if they could not gather the people they meant to influence. “Where were they to find the resources in finances and personnel to administer an effective program?”¹¹⁷ Evangelist Temesgen Doche reflects on the cumulative emotional impact of persecution: “It seemed like hell on earth, this long dark period when the Communists and those in the Youth Association considered us to be enemies of the country. It was a time when we were called foolish and weak people who were a burden to the country. We were discouraged and embarrassed. We despaired because of the poison in their accusations.”¹¹⁸

Although all evangelical church members felt the weight of persecution, Selassie considers the particular stresses that leaders carry: “as a leader...you kind of feel the brunt of the persecution. It's not only things happening to you, but handling things that would happen to the church also. You kind of feel it at two levels. You feel it at personal and family levels. Then you feel it also at the leadership level.” When

¹¹⁶ Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 231-232; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 41-43; Girma Haile, “Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church,” 13; Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Interviews 4, 8, 10, 18 and 22; in Interview 22 Bekele describes his sadness in response to the suicide of a former evangelist who became a Derg cadre and adds, “I always feel for the brothers we lost through that journey.”

¹¹⁷ Anger as a response to persecution is discussed in greater depth below in Section C.5.a (Anger toward persecutors and the Holy Spirit’s role in enabling love). Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 231-232; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 38-40, 56; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 24-25; Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Showalter, “Like Grains of Wheat,” 22-23; Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 16 and 22.

¹¹⁸ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 38; Teketel Chakiso offers a similar description of the stress of persecution:

It was the worst of times for the true Christians. If the grace of the Lord had not covered us, we would have died. Gathering and scattering on the sly was a fearful experience. We didn’t have many friends we could trust, and frequently we were regarded and treated as less than human. We were surrounded by fear, death, danger, and imprisonment. We felt very insecure. Anyone could come and take us away at any time. This was the darkest period in my life as well as for my Christian brothers and sisters.

the church was closed, he says, “We, as leaders, had to find ways...to handle the situation and shepherd the flock at the same time.”¹¹⁹

3. Faithfulness to Jesus Christ

For Meserete Kristos Church leaders, personal integrity was intimately entwined with faithfulness to Jesus Christ, their highest priority. Research participants often refer to the need to “stand firm,” “stand our ground,” “stand strong,” “stand up for what we believe,” “stand for what our conscience dictates,” “stand with Christ,” “stand with God” or “stand for the truth” in the face of external pressure.¹²⁰ This entailed a readiness to a) identify with Jesus Christ crucified, whatever the cost, and b) rely on God for resources to enable their faithfulness.

a. Allegiance to a crucified Messiah: Personal, public and nonnegotiable

A number of MKC leaders describe their experience of persecution as a natural outgrowth of their Christian faith. To identify with a crucified and risen Saviour is to share in his suffering. Teru says that she began to be persecuted as soon as she became a disciple of Jesus: “I have always considered Christianity as a way of suffering. It is not something of worldly pleasure. It's not comfortable as such. Persecution is the normal thing for a Christian. That's what I believe, because from the start I was ridiculed, I was segregated or discriminated against. So I think that persecution is really...normal.”¹²¹

Hakim describes a cumulative process of decision-making which prepared him to face the pressures of persecution. Prior to the Ethiopian revolution, he made a commitment to Christ, left the EOTC and joined the Meserete Kristos Church despite the disapproval of his family and community: “Somehow I was able to not compromise at that time. So I guess I was hardened. I had made decisions. So the things that came after that had little effect, you know.” Even so, his integrity was put to the test in prison: “There were times when there was consideration to get out, by doing things that could make us free...some

¹¹⁹ Interview 2.

¹²⁰ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 92; Interviews 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19 and 20.

¹²¹ Interview 8; in Interview 21 Teku remarks that, “Christianity cost Christ the cross.” In Interview 11 Desta says: “We have learned through persecution and we have grown through it, that Christianity is really a life that has persecution. Even in times of peace and freedom, if you really live a holy life, if you really lead a Christ-like life, you will face suffering of one type or another.”

suggested we could get out of this if we did certain shortcuts. Somehow by working together we closed that door. We said no to bribery: no. We are here and if the Lord saves us, okay. If not, we will continue.”¹²²

Berihun emphasizes the importance of a foundational commitment to stand with Christ and to be a faithful leader in the church: “God stands with the one who decides. When we do our part, when we make our decision, God does his work. That’s what I have experienced, not because of me, but because of his grace. God’s grace is abundant in times of need.”¹²³

Describing the experience of imprisoned leaders, Dawit points to the intimate connection between Jesus and those who suffer for his sake, “It was painful, but the One who suffered it before them on the cross knows the pain. [Of] everybody who was in prison...I never heard that anybody denied Christ.”¹²⁴

For Dawit, a key strategy for staying faithful to Jesus was to let others know about his spiritual allegiance:

...when you are...surrounded with the politics...sometimes...there is temptation [to compromise one’s faith]. I can’t say I was not tempted. That would mean...I am not a human being. That is false. So there was, but I never said, “I don’t know Jesus”...I just always referred to my faith wherever I went: at weddings or at their meetings, they knew that I was a Christian...at a wedding, if I was alone, I bowed down my head and prayed for the food that they were serving me...they knew that I was praying...I want to be consistent with my living.¹²⁵

¹²² Interview 16; Hakim’s resolve was also strengthened by the example of others who were ready to suffer because of their personal commitments:

...we learned from others, too. It’s not only us, [but also] political people. That encourages us... [You] ask yourself...“If those people could suffer for a cause that’s not as assured as ours, how much more should we!” I have seen political people so committed to what they believe, they knew they were going to die and...they didn’t try to save themselves. That was a time of decision...[There] were Jehovah Witnesses - six people - they were so strong. We learned from their example...Our theology was different...they were six engineers ...One was my cell mate...at one point...they questioned them, and they never compromised. A letter was written that these people are not cooperating: “They are against the revolution,” and then they were executed.

¹²³ Interview 3; In Interview 5 Kifle explains his commitment in light of his earlier resistance to God’s call: There were many, many conditions that would make me compromise my faith and my stand, but I had, as I mentioned earlier, I had kind of refused to preach to the gospel...on a number of occasions. But I finally had committed myself to God and the Lord had given me this command to proclaim the good news, so that command...from God...was always before me. When things went very, very hard, difficult times, when I was arrested, imprisoned, when I was threatened even by death, always I had promised to follow the Lord, and to tell the good news, to serve him, so that kept me strong.

¹²⁴ Interview 1; in Interview 5 Kifle recalls ministry in a difficult location where he had nothing to eat: I came to the house where I was staying with an empty stomach. I was tired, very exhausted, and I was trying to pray, but I couldn’t. I was so hungry inside, my stomach gnawing. And I almost despaired, but then I saw - kind of like in a revelation - I saw how Christ hung on the cross naked, and I also saw how he was beaten and was bleeding. This was all for me. And seeing this strengthened me. So I got up and I went and started doing my work, strengthened by what I saw and understood what Christ had gone through for me. So what’s this little kind of hunger and thirst and exhaustion?

¹²⁵ Interview 1; In Interview 12 Nyala describes her refusal to keep her faith a private matter, despite pressure from cadres who ridiculed her for it. Speaking of Jesus, she says: “I would tell them, “I know I have experienced him, his guidance, his protection. I feel his presence every day. You can’t...make me...forsake my faith.” So it made me strong. It made me come out with faith, to speak about it openly, and that has really made my relationship with God very strong.”

In Interview 7, Yacob says that when cadres wanted MKC leaders “to speak out and say that God doesn’t exist...we firmly...said, “God is present. God exists. We can’t accept what you say.”

Selassie discusses the challenge of living wisely within a difficult political environment, avoiding causing unnecessary offense, while at the same time being transparent about one's loyalty to Jesus Christ; he makes a distinction between primary and secondary matters: "If somebody came and said, 'Are you a Christian?' Definitely: 'Yes!' The core is no problem ... that is very easy to answer." In the cultural application of one's faith, however, Selassie sees much more latitude. He cautions: "Make sure the main thing is the main thing. That is why we did a lot of teaching on various matters of discipleship: that people, when they came to faith...were really grounded in the Word, and they belonged to a group, that they were not left alone." Commenting about persecution in a contemporary global context, Selassie observes: "Sometimes we waste our energy on non-issues. For me persecution is when somebody...tells me, 'Jesus Christ is not Lord.' That is an issue for me. I am ready to sacrifice anything, including my life for that. But if somebody says, 'Oh, you are not wearing the right clothes'...or, 'Shall we do our service on Friday in a Muslim country or on Sunday?' I wouldn't argue on that one."¹²⁶

While using discretion to avoid unnecessary suffering, MKC leaders did not shy away from declaring their allegiance to Jesus Christ. Their Christian identity was a public reality. Letting the world know about their most central, treasured commitment invited persecution but helped prevent significant gaps between their personal and communal personas. Jazarah, for example, posted the message, "Live the whole day fearing God" on a wall in her hotel. When cadres ordered her to remove it she said, "It will stay. It will stay hanging until you go." She adds, "The Lord was really with me. I felt his protection and presence...I felt being the Lord's child was really a privilege." As a teacher in a government-run school Gemechu regularly wore a belt that said, "Jesus saves," and a cross pinned on his shirt pocket.¹²⁷ Solomon highlights the importance of anchoring his personal identity in Jesus rather than the approval of others:

¹²⁶ Interview 2.

¹²⁷ Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 89-93; Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 20, 21 and 22. As a result of his witness, Gemechu and two other Christian teachers were accused of being CIA agents, "imperialist dogs" and "of injecting theism into the minds of the growing children." At a monthly workplace indoctrination session, they were presented with a statement summarizing the accusations against them signed by all other teachers present. The assembly also passed a resolution ordering the accused to appear at the regional communist party office for questioning. Gemechu says that when he appeared before the regional official the following week:

He told me that he also had once been a Christian but the truth of Marxism and Scientific Socialism changed him. He argued against me with many strong words and warnings. At that time I was empowered by the Holy Spirit, and I gave answers boldly in [an] unexpected way. After he warned me with so many words, he said, be careful you may be imprisoned or even you may [lose] your job. Think of your wife and your children and how you will miss them if you continue like this". Then he let me go with threatening words. The next morning, the friend of the communist officer came to me and asked me whether I have connections with any

...the Lord has taught me...not to be taken over when people speak highly about me...At the same time, also, not to despair or to fear when they say, "Crucify him." When they say, "Hosanna," I should think that "Crucify him" may come next. When "Crucify him" comes, there is resurrection. This the Lord has taught me all along, and it has helped me. Also a prayer I was taught: not to ask people to be with me, but he (Jesus) to be with me. I used to say, "Lord, I don't ask people to be with me. I don't mind if people are against me, but be you with me." That was a common prayer for me.¹²⁸

Publicly identifying as disciples of Jesus Christ exposed MKC leaders to direct pressure to renounce their faith. When kebele officials wanted Nazareth Bible Academy students to take an oath denying their faith, school administrator Alemayehu Assefa told them, "You can't force our minds. We will obey what does not go against our religion. But if you go against our religion, we will not obey you. We obey God. Our minds are God's property." When the cadres said, "What we cannot settle around the table, we will settle with our guns," Alemayehu answered, "Your guns are to protect us, not to kill us. But we are ready and happy to die for our faith."¹²⁹

b. Reliance on God to enable personal faithfulness

MKC leaders recognized their inability to fulfill their commitments to Christ and his kingdom on their own strength. Aware of their human weakness, they understood that some of their normal emotional reactions to persecution had potential to undermine their leadership, and wanted to actively rely on God for resources to equip them for living out their call. Interviewees enthusiastically practiced Bible study, prayer and fasting as disciplines for seeking the presence, provision, guidance and power of God. With gratitude

higher official in the party who might be looking out for me. I asked him why he asked this question. He replied that he had heard that I had spoken to the officer as if I trusted a higher officer. I replied "Yes I have the highest officer who has power over all the worldly authorities. [His] name is Jesus Christ the Savior of the world. He is the one who made me bold and powerful.

¹²⁸ Interview 18; in Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 25-28, Tasisa Esthete also identifies with Jesus Christ facing the shouts of "Crucify him!" as he recounts his own story of having his life threatening by an angry mob at a zemecha camp.

Within the volatility of the Ethiopian revolution, commitment to Christ was often interpreted as political opposition to the Derg. In Interview 19, Tengene explains that his embrace of evangelical Christian identity was complicated by his prior involvement with the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP). Arrested with his family, Tengene was accused of fighting the government under "another cloak...under the guise of Christianity" to hide his imperialist agenda as a CIA agent. The arresting colonel threatened: "Unless you renounce your involvement in the church and sign that you won't do it anymore, I will take the necessary measure." (which probably means, "I will execute you.")... That was the time of Red Terror...That was a very difficult moment for me, but God was on my side and he strengthened me." Tengene tried to convince the colonel that his allegiance to Jesus had, in fact, made him a better citizen:

I answered him this way: "Before I...knew Jesus, I really offended my country, my government, my people, but now since I know Jesus Christ, I have become a useful citizen to my country, to my government and to my people. At church we don't preach against the government. You can come and see." God saved me from his hand. People in prison with me... (like the disciples were praying for the safety of Peter)...were praying for me...After a month I was released.

¹²⁹ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 172-174.

and joy they remember times when the Holy Spirit fortified them internally, enabling them to act with courage in the face of external pressure.

Reflecting on the challenges of persecution, Zere says, “We had to really stand firm. They were really tough times for us, but we knew that the Lord was with us and we were able to weather the storm that was flowing over us.” Alemu emphasizes the importance of “faithfulness to a faithful God,” adding that, “If you are not really faithful and dependent on God, it would be very hard to go through times of difficulty...” Solomon says, “We couldn't afford not to walk with the Lord day by day...If you are not with him, then you are lost.” Kelile testifies to God’s provision and help during the persecution: “God kind of opens...a tiny window through which we go through difficult times. God wants us to really test our dependence on him...It's so tight. We have to squeeze through and suffer, but the Lord always helps you. He gives you the strength as long as you trust him. So...persecution is really a way of God testing how much we love him, how much we depend on him.”¹³⁰

Unlike those who fall away from Christ, Lema says that believers “who understand the love of God stick to their faith: in their office, wherever they work.” Like other leaders, he identifies Bible study and prayer as essential spiritual disciplines: “They draw near to God by their own prayer, reading the Scriptures in order to get a word of courage. That enables them.”¹³¹ Interviewees describe the results of reading and obeying the Bible combined with passionate, sustained prayer: experience of the presence of God, intimacy and friendship with God, encouragement, strength, and keeping an eternal rather than

¹³⁰ Interviews 4, 13, 10, 17, 18, respectively; in Interview 13 Zere says:

Hard times really make you go closer to the Lord, to depend on him for strength, for power. When it is easy... sometimes we slacken and kind of become careless. We are not as serious and given to our faith and practice. But when persecution comes, then you really pray hard, you study the Word of God, you start having serious fellowship with Christian brothers and sisters. So during the persecution years we read the Word of God more deeply and...we prayed long hours, asking God to give us the strength we need and the grace we need. So, persecution really is a way of bringing us closer to God...to commune with him.

In Interview 15, Semer says, “During the persecution period, we really...came to realize the faithfulness and the power of God, his protection. We understood that we couldn't really stand on...our own strength.” In Interview 17, Lema observes, “When you have challenges from outside, you draw near to God: ‘God, help me. Deliver me.’” Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 178, cites Kassa Agafari who, on a visit to the United States in 1990, said, “We learned that the way to go up is down. We experienced the protection of the Lord.”

¹³¹ Interview 17; Strong emphasis on Bible study and prayer pervades the source material. Various leaders testify: “I felt... [God’s] presence...very strongly, that he was with me. And I also was really rooted in his Word. I read the Bible very fervently and prayed. And so [persecution] has really made me dependent on God and cling to him very close.” (Interview 12) “I spent many, many hours praying that the Lord would keep me grounded in the faith, and grow in reading the Bible, reading his Word.” (Interview 13) “I...prayed for myself and prayed with others. That also gave me the courage to stand through those testing, withering moments.” (Interview 10). “My weapon of fighting against this pressure was prayer. I prayed a lot to God, to give me strength to stand up for my faith.” (Interview 6)

temporal perspective.¹³² All night prayer meetings were common; some leaders fasted and prayed for extended periods of time. Bekele remembers that even apart from regular cell meetings, “We would have our own friends together. For a week we would take our vacation and...close the door. We...fasted...just taking liquid; otherwise we didn’t take any food...We used to pray, and God used to speak to us.”¹³³

Leaders’ commitment to Jesus Christ, their practice of spiritual disciplines and their pursuit of God’s purposes was energized by a confidence in the Holy Spirit. Writing as one active in leadership in the Derg years as well as a researcher, Gemechu describes “a profound reliance upon the reality and efficacy of the Spirit’s presence and activity” among MKC leaders: “Repeatedly, believers recall that the experience of persecution forced them to seek the power of the Holy Spirit. Christians were organized in groups to pray without ceasing, and they prayed specifically for the power of the Holy Spirit. It is their conviction that the God who promised to give his power for those who seek day and night poured his Spirit on his people.”¹³⁴

In an interview shortly after the fall of the Derg, a church leader testifies that, “A great change came upon us after we began to fast and pray together. One day as we prayed the Holy Spirit came upon each one of us, like in the Book of Acts.” Gemechu observes that through the Spirit, MKC members and leaders experienced “deep intimacy with God” and “living union and fellowship with Christ.” Berihun insists that human commitment is not enough; faithfulness requires power from the Holy Spirit:

¹³² Interviews 5, 8, 10 and 17; In Interview 4 Kelile recalls that “We knew that the socialist revolution would not last forever.” Reflecting on 1 Peter 1:22-23, he says:

You know, many things will pass, wither away, but the Word of God will live forever. Many movements and many governments come and go, but the rule of God is forever. His Word is everlasting, so that was a strengthening message to me. And so the old things have passed away. We are a new creation in Christ. That also had a special meaning for me. These things will pass away, but I am a new creation in Christ and I will stay. If I trust him, I will stay strong forever.

In Interview 20 Mamo says that after reading the Bible together as a family, “we discussed the present situation and told our children, “Don’t be worried. This will fall. Marxism and Leninism will go away. Even the Derg will go away... All of them will go away, but God will stay forever. So we have to stay with God.”

¹³³ Interview 22; in Interview 17 Lema describes the blessing of fasting and praying for five days or two weeks:

We fast and we pray and God is giving us courage for the ministry, for the life which he has given unto us. These things enabled us to stand before him. With his grace he enabled us...also the Word which we read; it gave us hope. Sometimes the gifts of the Spirit, prophecy, sometimes the illumination of the Spirit; we were getting a word of courage from the Spirit: God is protecting us, encouraging us. The time is coming. The light is coming. That grabs our spirit: “Okay, the time is coming. God is at work.” Such...things give courage.

In Interview 15, Semer describes a time in which MKC leaders faced “threats from the kebele and from the district officials that they would arrest us and put us under custody.” He remembers about twenty evangelists and elders meeting at his house that August to fast and pray. He says:

We weren’t afraid because we felt God was really protecting us and it was for his kingdom that we were meeting and praying for guidance. And so we were happy and we felt very much protected and safe in the Lord even though it was really something forbidden; we were told not to have more than two or three people talking to each other or gathering, but we had such a large group and it was because we felt that God would not just give us to them, that he would protect us. So that’s when I feel that the Lord was really with us.

¹³⁴ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 67.

Otherwise, our ministry and service would be formal, kind of lukewarm, you know? And in this way, no persecution would come... [The] devil doesn't touch us because we are [just] nominal [Christians]...[In] the Book of Joel, God saw that and he poured out his Spirit. We need revival, genuinely. We need that power to face the kings, to face the enemy...With power we face the evil one when we are filled with the love of God. We need that love. And love does the work; nothing else. When we say, "power," it's the love of God. When I receive the Holy Spirit, it's the love of God shaped in my heart. And there and then I know that God is God, the Creator, One, all powerful, omniscient, omnipotent, and the devil is a defeated enemy...When the Holy Spirit comes, our spiritual eyes are opened wide.

With a smile, he adds, "And sometimes you will be considered as 'loose screws' here."¹³⁵

Leaders attest to the Holy Spirit's strength, encouragement, impartation of love for God and his people, and gifts of wisdom and guidance. Dawit says, "The power of the Holy Spirit led us. We don't know how we were led, but sometimes it was in a unique way...it was not our work. It was his work."¹³⁶

Overcoming fear – at least refusing to be immobilized by it – was an essential task for persecuted leaders. Imprisoned for a year because of his leadership role in MKC, Selassie reflects on the potential for fear to weaken the church through an erosion of faith:

In every situation...you realize...the other side wants you...to compromise, water-down this movement by weakening you, by weakening the whole group. Yes, there were pressures...in retrospect, you see a lot of things clearly, but at that time, you couldn't see whether you would live or not live. We could have very easily have been killed, too...in fact that was the plan...[When] you are in that situation, for me it's like the kind of prayer Jesus prayed, "Let this cup pass from me; yet not my will but yours." I don't know. I was not there...but if it came to a point where "We are going to kill you"...I was not tempted by that...I did not want to die, like...most people. I had ...a very young family...I was never put to that test. But the part that is subtle is an eroding away of your faith, of your stand, to kind of...walk in fear. That is a big temptation.¹³⁷

Gemechu says that MKC leaders "overcame the fear of persecution through seeking the power of God," adding "Theirs was an experience of God's glory and presence."¹³⁸ Some describe a miraculous lack of fear during the Derg era, attributing it to the presence of God. For example Kifle says, "The Lord was

¹³⁵ Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 68; Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Interview 3.

¹³⁶ Interviews 1, 4, 13, 17 and 21; Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 55, 70, 72; Girma Haile, "Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church," 28. In Interview 17 Melaku remembers: "The pressure was of course very, very stiff, very tough, but we felt God's presence was with us...the Lord was giving us the strength we needed. We didn't really feel the pain...of suffering too much. Early Sunday morning, we would get up and go to 19 houses and...do a communion service, give the Lord's Supper to many people and we felt like this was really God's presence and God's strength that held us up."

¹³⁷ Interview 2; later Selassie adds that despite temptations to compromise, "I think God doesn't give you more challenges than you can bear...the Lord knew our strength and weaknesses and his grace was abundant."

¹³⁸ Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 69; Speaking about his prison experience in Interview 2, Selassie testifies: "God is real, real. That is what you see. There is nobody there who would help you out, per se. You are sequestered. You are within concrete walls and metal gates and guns to guard you. The only freedom you have is vertical and God is close, very close; real, very real."

with me, so I wasn't afraid."¹³⁹ Others identify moments when God equipped them to face their fears, often through particular Scriptures. Berihun describes a fifteen day period after the closure of the church and the arrest of other leaders when he stayed with relatives. Without going home or to work, he tried to get his affairs in order in case he was also imprisoned. At the end of that time, he says: "God spoke to me. It was Matthew 16:18: "You are Peter a stone, and upon this rock I will build my church and all the powers of hell shall not prevail against it." I felt strengthened. God was at work. He was building his church. Nothing could prevail against it. I decided to go back home. I was ready to face whatever came my way."¹⁴⁰

Selassie overcame his fear and anxiety when he heard God speak to him through a portion of Scripture. Remembering the first three or four weeks of a year-long imprisonment, Selassie confesses that,

You are always tempted to the think in the natural. What would happen to my family? ...My daughter was three years old (the oldest one), the youngest...one and a half. And my wife's salary was probably one fourth (barely) of mine. That gets you. It's really painful when you are there for months and there is no income. Your trust and faith is challenged deeply...I was very concerned what would happen, so concerned that I didn't sleep too much; probably two, three hours a day.¹⁴¹

While struggling with sleeplessness and the stressful conditions of prison, Selassie says:

...one of my brothers who was in prison...comes to me one fine morning and he says, "I have a word for you from the Lord." And...he just gave me verses that the Lord told him to give me...It just hit the nail on the head...it showed how God is protecting me and providing for me right there through all this. The message was loud and clear: If the Lord God is my father, what stops him

¹³⁹ Interview 5; In Interview 14 Jazarah says, "I have never been frightened. I have never been afraid, because I feel the presence of the Lord always." In Interview 7 Yacob testifies: "Of course there were many challenges, like imprisonment or being beaten up or even being killed, but I was really never frightened...I depended every day on God. Everything was in his hands...God is with me. His presence surrounds me." In Interview 1 Dawit says: "I knew there was no security at all. Zero security. But totally, my dependence on God just took away the fear...I am a hundred percent sure to die. If something happened, I was ready. So I am always facing death, just as Paul says. We are facing death. We are just going forward."

¹⁴⁰ Interview 3; Berihun adds: "And I have been filled with power, hope and peace and love of God." About a week after he received encouragement from Matthew 16:18, Berihun was on a hospital visit and met a nurse, the wife of a friend, who had a message for him. He says:

There was fear all over the country and the capital city that more people were going to be arrested, so this nurse told me, "Berihun, don't be afraid." I said, "Why?"

"Because there is a friend of mine who is a believer; She had a dream. In her dream, she saw you having a small baby - a beautiful baby, up on the top of a hill. Under the hill there was a river flowing down. And then she heard a voice saying, 'Get those three revolutionists: Karl Marx, Engels and Lenin.' And then someone went to get them - in her dream. Then in the course of time, the soldiers, the army of the Derg, were taken by that river. That river was taking them. Finally there was heavy rain and then the army of the Derg was taken by that powerful flood, but I remained on the top of the hill with that beautiful baby." That baby was MKC, she said, "And you are not going to be arrested." She told me this after I got that message from Matthew 16:18. Already God filled me with power.

¹⁴¹ Interview 22; in Interview 1 Dawit describes a similar worry and need to trust God with his family: "with seven years of my marriage, we had five children. They were all little kids. And then...what throws to my mind: if you are caught, and then jailed, what about your kids? Why don't you think for your kids? I don't know. I don't know. They are God's kids. They are not mine. He is the one who cares for them."

from being a father and provider for my family? I tell you, until I came out I didn't worry. And when I came out, they were better taken care of than I would have provided for them.¹⁴²

In addition to hearing God speak through Scripture some leaders describe how God helped them overcome their fear through visions, dreams or direct words from God. When Zere and his family began hosting cell and leadership meetings in their home in 1978, he had a vision in which his neighbourhood and city were covered by severe darkness, but surrounding his home, just outside the walled perimeter of his yard, was a powerful light. "I realized that God's presence, God's glory, was really surrounding us and that we should not be afraid of any coming danger," he says. Solomon recalls a time when he became aware of developments that could have easily led to the imprisonment of many MKC leaders: "At one point we were scared that the church was going to be...in serious danger. I couldn't share with others, but I shared it with Alemu and we started praying – for three days...We fasted the first day. The second day, in the afternoon the Lord spoke to us, 'Don't be afraid. I have handled it. There will be no problem for the church.' The Lord used to help us: the King was in control."¹⁴³

¹⁴² Interview 2; reflecting further on the impact of the Scripture (2 Corinthians 6:3-10) on him, Selassie explains:

...some of the words, of course, applied to me, the things that I was experiencing, like the sleepless nights, the imprisonment and even food, it's not what you want, and people looking at you as if you were some...but Paul says we give no cause to be accused of anything, even if these [things] are happening. Because it's for God, and God, of course, knew what was happening and for me, the message was, "Okay, Lord, not all of these things happened to me. Who knows what is going to happen tomorrow? You are in control. You continue to provide." I am [not] really starved there in that place and so why would I think that my family would starve, as if the Lord loses control when you are not there? And also, the other message that came to me, was my family was becoming kind of an idol for me while this huge thing of being faithful to God and being a testimony of his love and care is the weight that is on me. So it was a God-moment for me, and so I really, I just let things go. I slept 8 hours a day...

In Interview 12 Nyala remembers that soon after the closing of the church, when her late husband met with another leader to pray and fast for 21 days, "he got a message from the Lord: Genesis 15:1, where it says, "I am your shield. I am your protector. Don't be afraid. You are worth so much to me." She says, "After he got this message, he started the work seriously, even though nothing was allowed of Christianity, adding, "That was when the work was started, to organize the church underground." In Interview 13, Zere admits that he panicked when he learned that military officers were coming to conscript eleven young relatives living in his home, "but the Lord gave me the Scripture in Matthew 10, verse 30, where the hair on your head is counted in the eyes of the Lord. Do not be afraid..." He was greatly encouraged.

¹⁴³ Interviews 13 and 18; in Interview 19, Tengene describes a prophetic dream just before 1982 in which he says, "The Lord spoke to me, telling me that the church was going to be closed." In his dream, a procession of people came out of the MKC building in Addis Ababa, each with a stick representing the Word of God – a symbol of protection and help from God through difficulty. "A stick was given to me and I walked with them a long distance." Later, when the church was "really frightened" and "about to scatter" Tengene heard a voice saying, "Don't be afraid." In Interview 17 Lema describes the encouragement he received after prominent church leaders were put in prison:

...it was not easy to continue in the ministry, but God gave me a vision. That vision encouraged me to stay in the ministry. Again one time I saw another vision, in which me and the other brothers attending that congregation were in prison. But I saw a vision. An angel was coming down. It was very big. How was he going to enter in this place? You know, the bigness and small door, when I tried to compare the situation; but he entered directly down into the prison, and he held my hand. He took me out from the jail. "So God, is that possible to be in the ministry in such a dark situation?" I heard a voice. "Oh yes. I have a great open door for you." You know, that vision gave me courage to continue in the ministry.

Sometimes leaders experienced a strengthening from the Holy Spirit when called to do a particular task. In 1977 Alemayehu Assefa was asked to be part of a delegation of church leaders to visit the governor of Nazareth to seek an end to the mistreatment of evangelical Christians in the region. He recalls:

Before we six leaders were nominated to make this approach to the governor, there was fear in my heart. I said, “God, don’t let the leaders choose me: I am not ready to face this.” But after I was chosen, I felt strong; I felt happy. The fear went away. I said, “Thank you, Lord, for the chance to die for you.” The idea did not come from my flesh. God put his power in me. God puts his own power in people when he uses them as an instrument.¹⁴⁴

Persecution has the potential to shake the foundations of leaders’ faith, making them vulnerable to external pressures by undercutting their internal strength. Hakim describes his spiritual disorientation at the beginning of a four-and-a-half-year incarceration; he had expected that faithful Christian service would bring reward from God rather than suffering. He confesses:

...there were times I thought God was unreasonable. The first three months I was in prison, I wasn't exactly an atheist, but I was close...I was just butting the wall with my head. I was expecting an award for the good things I did. “Is this what you pay me?” But after three months, it was a dead end. I came to myself...I was eating only once a day because I was angry at God. But after three months I came back to my senses and I said, “Well, did I forget all the beatings that Paul received and all the people who died...going back to the Bible? This is foolish.” And when I saw also the political people paying a price for what they believed, it was a challenge to me, and so I broke my fast. After three months I began to eat, and then I was to know there was a reward from the Lord.

As his renewed faith enabled him to again live more confidently, prison authorities recognized Hakim’s integrity and appointed him health officer for the 350 inmates in the compound rather choosing one of the medical doctors in the facility.¹⁴⁵

In Interview 12, Nyala recounts how her fear threatened to undermine her husband’s ministry as an evangelist. Although he was unafraid of persecution, she admits “I was scared sometimes, scared for myself, for him, too.” She says that when a letter calling for her husband’s arrest was sent to the twenty kebeles in her town, “I didn’t really tell him of my fear...but the Lord encouraged me....In my dream, around our house there were burning torches and the Lord was saying – like in the Psalms – ‘I am...surrounding Jerusalem. Don’t be afraid.’ So I was encouraged and I didn’t even express my fear to him.” With a smile she adds, “When I was ready to interfere in his activities, in his movement, the Lord always spoke to me through the Word and I kept my mouth shut. The Lord told me to be quiet and I kept quiet.”

¹⁴⁴ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 174-175.

¹⁴⁵ Interview 16: Hakim describes some of the dynamics involved in his appointment:

We had twelve cells, and each had a health officer. I was in charge overall. So every morning, I would go and say, “Is there somebody sick?” and then take them to the clinic. That was an opportunity for me also to breathe some fresh air. But the way that I was chosen also was almost like a miracle. The man in charge came ...He was a big official in the government who came to visit, and he asked me to take that position, because if he chose other people, they would only take their own. You know, there were political factions there. If he chose from the Oromo, they would be partial to the Oromo. If he chose from the Eritreans, they would [be partial to Eritreans] ...they said to me that I am the only person of no colour. They said they realized that there is integrity among us.

In Interview 2, another leader, Selassie, describes his own experience as a medical representative for prisoners. His appointment to the role about two months into his incarceration meant he decided which prisoners would be able to go to the clinic or not. Authorized to dispense basic medications for headaches and stomach pains, Selassie

Dawit remembers God's extraordinary provision of strength during the years of the Derg and contrasts it with his current experience living in the United States. Under persecution, he says, "You always depend totally on God" and as a result, "there was no fear. I don't know. From where did I get boldness? I wouldn't have that boldness now. I am living in a free country, but I don't have that boldness anymore. I wonder how...just, within that time."¹⁴⁶

4. Dynamics of personal integrity in leaders' responses to persecution

An assault on evangelical leaders' deepest commitments, persecution regularly tested their integrity and faith, forcing them to consider the cost and implications of their convictions. How could they live out their identity as Jesus-followers in this context? To what extent could they comply with the demands of the Derg or contribute to its programme without compromising their loyalty to Jesus Christ? At what points could they be quiet nonconformists? When should they be more vocal about their faith and principles? Research participants identify common dilemmas about how to best express their faith and call as Christian leaders, including a) which, if any revolutionary slogans they could say in good conscience, b) the extent to which the church and its leaders could participate in Derg organizational life and programs, c) when to defy Derg directives; d) their response to attempts to shut down ministry, and e) navigating political minefields in the workplace.

a. Revolutionary slogans

As public declarations of support for the new political order, the chanting of revolutionary slogans became a litmus test for revealing the allegiance of Ethiopian citizens. MKC members universally recognized some slogans as direct challenges to their devotion to Jesus Christ. They avoided saying, "First, Ethiopia!" which elevated the nation to the position of an idol, insisting that the proper order of loyalty was "First Jesus, then country." Similarly, to repeat, "The revolution is above everything!" would controvert their faith in the authority of Jesus and the sovereignty of God, who is truly above all. Refusing to declare

says, "One person said, 'I don't know what this man does, but whatever he gives me...I get healed...in fact, I don't need to go to the clinic.' And some people with stress problems, worrying and...agitated would come to me and then I would...pray silently...and...counsel them...." Selassie notes that while in prison, "People knew who we were and what we stood for." A fellow prisoner asked him, "Why are you in prison, anyway; you and your people?" but added: "You don't have to answer it. I don't see any problem with you people. We...embezzled money...We stole...many people [are] like that; But you? What did you do? You are good people...Oh maybe...God is protecting you from things that are worse." Selassie adds: "It is God who gave us favour in there."

¹⁴⁶ Interview 1.

the accepted “truths” of the revolution with fellow citizens in political meetings or under interrogation, they were portrayed as disloyal to their country. Many were beaten or arrested because of it.¹⁴⁷

MKC leaders express varying views about the acceptability of other revolutionary slogans. Most rejected all Derg-initiated shibboleths. Yacob, for example, refused to say, “Down with capitalism!” or “Down with imperialism!” explaining, “I never raised my hands and never said the slogans because it was like cursing or damning people or governments.” Solomon, however, did not have a problem with saying “Down with imperialism,” although he refused to say, “The revolution above everything else.” As a leader, he wanted to help young believers discern between acceptable and unacceptable declarations. Authorities were sometimes satisfied if a person said some – even if not all – slogans. For Solomon it was legitimate for Christians to avoid unnecessary suffering. At the same time, he understood that many believers rejected all slogans and he did not want to undermine their faith. He asked himself, “If I say certain slogans and if I don't say certain slogans, would that become an obstacle for the church? I was struggling with that.” Even so, was he willing to die for the sake a few words that he could say without violating his conscience? Whatever his stance, he recognized, “I have to go to the end, even to the giving of my life...I shouldn't go half way...if I refuse, I should refuse to the end. And the cost could be anything. But if in my mind, I am not convinced [I need to refuse saying] every slogan...and pay the price to the end, that was a struggle for me.” Concerned for the well-being of the church – and the integrity of his own witness – he prayed for direction. After expressing his willingness to pay the price of obedience, he says, “I just told the Lord, ‘As far as I am concerned, I don't mind saying these slogans, but if for the purpose of the body of the church, if you want me to refuse saying that, please tell me.’ That was a struggle I had.”¹⁴⁸

Jazarah tried to deflect the attention of the authorities from her refusal to shout revolutionary slogans by keeping a purse in her left hand and an umbrella in her right during kebele meetings, so that she

¹⁴⁷ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 30; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 174-175; Lehman, “Aster Debossie,” 1; Interviews 4, 9, 10, 11, 16 17, 18 and 21; in Interview 17 Lema says, “The communist people tried to...[force] us to say their slogans. You know, against our faith, but God gave us courage not to say their own slogans.” In Interview 9, Louam remembers when a cadre at an indoctrination sessions shouted at him, “Next week, you will definitely say the slogans.” The following week, in preparation for his imprisonment, Louam gave his watch to his my wife, and went to the meeting location. After ten minutes, a telephone call came with the message, “There is nobody to come to this session, because we are short of cadres.” Louam remembers, “I was really happy because the Lord intervened. I went home and took my watch again and put it on my wrist. I was really happy, because I had stood firm and said that I wouldn't say the slogans.”

¹⁴⁸ Interviews 7 and 18; in Interview 9 Louam describes his refusal to repeat these slogans and his suspicion of evangelical leaders who believed that certain slogans did not contradict Christian faith. He adds, “... the Lord in the Word made us realize that we are more than conquerors in Christ, and we never gave in to such pressure.”

had an understandable reason to not comply when the crowd was ordered to, "Raise your left arm and say, 'Down with imperialism.'" She says, "I went through all those years without saying a slogan."¹⁴⁹

Teku was one of five Christian youth leaders imprisoned by the kebele. After beating them for their faith, the authorities tried to compel them to say a slogan. Initially all five refused to comply. The guards separated them and convinced the other four that it would not be cursing God to say it. Teku says, "They came and told me that to say, for example, 'Down with imperialism!' does not mean, 'Down with God!'" He did not accept that. After a series of further beatings, however, Teku compromised his convictions: "Though my conscience didn't accept it, I agreed to say the slogan." Released from custody, Teku walked home with his father, full of regret and guilt, "angry, because it seemed to me that I had cursed God...My conscience was not free." Repentant, he says, "I was suffering from what I had done. And then immediately...while we were walking to my parents' home...The Holy Spirit brought Peter to my mind. Peter denied Jesus Christ, but he repented. Then finally he was empowered by the power of the Holy Spirit. Immediately, I was energized to...continue serving my God."¹⁵⁰

b. Derg organizational life and programmes

To what extent could the Meserete Kristos Church and its leaders participate in Derg initiatives without compromising their allegiance to Jesus and the kingdom of God? Among other challenges, leaders needed to navigate questions regarding i) Derg community development programmes, ii) the use of church property, iii) participation in political meetings and ideological education, iv) government party membership and leadership, and v) participation in the military.

¹⁴⁹ Interview 14; with a smile Jazarah notes that as a business owner it would have been particularly odd for her to shout, "Down with the bourgeois!"

¹⁵⁰ Interview 21; Interview 16 also refers to the biblical story of Peter's restoration to fellowship with Jesus after compromising his faith. In Interview 8, Teru describes her refusal to say a revolutionary slogan while in custody. Arrested by twenty armed cadres while hosting a prayer meeting soon after returning from university, Teru was taken to the kebele office. She says, "I felt like when Peter was in prison and the angel came and touched him on the side and said, 'Wake up. Get up.' I felt something like that...bold inside and...confident that God was going to fill me with his presence." When a Derg officer asked her, "Can you say a slogan for me?" she answered, "I don't say slogans [just] anywhere, any place. Saying slogans has a purpose. [There is] a time for it. I don't say slogans anywhere you like." Angry, the officer said, "This is the kebele office" to which she replied, "Well, I don't know if it is the kebele or what. I know it's a building with roof and walls and..." Furious, the man threatened to send her to a certain place, but his colleague intervened, reminding him that the kebele had sent her a complimentary letter of recommendation when she began university: "We just sent her with a nice letter. It's not your responsibility or mine to arrest her and put her in some place."

i. Community development programmes

As the revolution unfolded, MKC leaders wanted to support genuine efforts to strengthen the nation and enhance the lives of fellow citizens. Youth were encouraged to take part in zemecha literacy and development campaigns. Selassie highlights the importance of backing initiatives that advanced beneficial social goals. For example, if the local government decided to build a road for the community or “discuss what we do to help the community,” it was crucial, for the witness of the church, to participate. He notes that if church members would say, “I’m not part of that. I’m not coming,” they would look like they are “anti-society.” Other times, when kebele programmes were “clearly political,” the church needed to stand its ground, whatever the consequences. Zere recalls a visit from a revolutionary guard who told him he was wanted for questioning at the kebele office. When Zere arrived, authorities said: “You followers of the new faith that has been imported from abroad, you are not really supporting the revolution. In fact, you are opposing it. You don’t participate in any of our activities, so we are going to force you to participate in one type of activity.” Zere prayed, “In Jesus’ name I don’t want to really be involved in any of their atheistic or anti-Christian activities.” He remembers, “Finally they said, ‘You will be in the development committee.’ That’s the committee responsible for the literacy campaign and helping poor and so on. So that was like a Christian duty! So I praised the Lord that I was put in that area of service.”¹⁵¹

Although MKC leaders could support the goals of such programs, when participating in them they often encountered prejudice, discriminatory behaviour, propaganda, and attempts to intimidate them.¹⁵²

ii. Derg use of church property

While the church supported government development goals like literacy training, MKC leaders resisted the use of church property for Derg programs. When the government wanted to hold literary classes on the Nazareth MKC property, leaders refused, recognizing that such programs could easily morph into Marxist indoctrination sessions. Pointing out that it was a place of worship, Nazareth elders said, “Why

¹⁵¹ Interviews 2 and 13; in Interview 14 Jazarah says, “Towards the beginning, we tried to really go along with some of the nice projects, the programs they had, like the literacy campaign or trying to indoctrinate people about the need for Ethiopia to grow, doing development work and so on.”

¹⁵² Interview 14; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 25-28; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 165-166, 176-177; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 253-254. In Interview 10, Abebech recalls her frustration teaching a mandatory literacy class to unmotivated older men and women. Although her supervisors “were very hard on evangelical Christians” – and would put them in custody for a few hours if they were unsatisfied with their performance – her students freely came late to class, talked while she teaching and left early.

don't you do that to the Orthodox Church and to the Muslim mosques? This is a sanctuary to worship the Lord. But we are willing to build classrooms for you on the kebele compound, if you want to.” To show support for community development the church instead built four classrooms for literacy teaching on local government property.¹⁵³

iii. Participation in political meetings and ideological education

How did MKC leaders respond to Derg demands for participation in ideological training? Selassie describes the dilemma in the early years of the revolution, when kebele leaders would call a community meeting to coincide with Sunday morning worship:

You had to make a choice. Where do you go? And then it wasn't like the decision was only yours, but there were community police who were standing on the road and challenging you...you had to make a decision and take steps, wise steps to decide what to do under those circumstances. Sometimes...it would be announced over the media that there would be such and such a meeting and everybody was expected to go. Now as leaders, do you decide today we don't have Sunday church or...stand your ground? It was a time when really you had to walk very carefully.

In general church leaders encouraged believers to attend indoctrination sessions without accepting Marxist ideology. Yacob remembers, “They used to gather people and try to teach their Marxist-Leninist ideology. We attended the classes but did not really accept what they said.” As discussed above, MKC leaders abstained from repeating revolutionary slogans at public meetings. Their nonconformity was not only passive, however. At times they also publicly challenged Derg ideology, presenting a biblical perspective to issues at hand or explicit witness to Jesus Christ. Unlike some other mission-based churches, MKC complied with a government order to teach a course on Marxism at its Bible Academy. Leaders reasoned that Christians presenting the material could help students critically engage communist philosophy and counter its influence.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 166, 176-177; Interview 10. Interviews 9 and 14 describe the same incident. In contrast to the ability of Nazareth MKC leaders to limit government use of church property in the 1970s, Gemechu Gebre Telila, “History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 37, notes that in 1977 kebele officials in Wonji Gefersa used local MKC facilities without permission, scheduling socialist gatherings at the site when the church would normally have worship.

¹⁵⁴ Interviews 2 and 4; Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 231-232; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 167-168; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 254-256. In Interview 11, Desta describes an indoctrination session at the school where she was teaching in which cadres celebrated the arrest of MKC leader Kedir. In response, she stood up and said, “You can't really talk bad about MKC. They are doing the right thing, showing Christ.” When the cadre threatened her with arrest and torture, she answered, “Without God's will you can't touch one hair of mine.” She adds: “I never compromised...sometimes the pressure was so tough. I prayed one time, ‘Lord, if the pressure is too much for me to bear, when I have just five minutes left, just take my life, take me away so I wouldn't deny you...’ I was really determined to follow Christ in whatever kind of situation I found myself.”

iv. Party membership and leadership

Although Derg party structure evolved over time, from early in its rule the regime was eager to cement citizens' loyalty to the revolution through party membership, particularly targeting the educated. MKC leaders consistently rejected political affiliation. Gemechu describes a visit from a former Christian who tried to persuade him to join the communist party. After sharing his hopes for a socialist Ethiopia, his guest enumerated the benefits enjoyed by party members: free medical care, life insurance, and scholarships to universities in other communist countries for themselves and their children. "If you want to live in peace within Communist Ethiopia," he said, "you must become a party member." When his visitor pressed him for an immediate decision, Gemechu replied, "No. Thank you very much for invitation, but I am a Christian. As you know, Christianity is not compatible with communism. Do you know my brother, that I am already insured and secured by Jesus my Lord, the almighty God? Sorry, brother, but I cannot grant any place for your invitation." His guest implored him, "Gemechu, don't be foolish. You are an educated man. Don't you know that our country needs educated people badly? If you accept this invitation you will be promoted to a high rank with in a very short time. Please don't miss this advantage." Gemechu says, "Again, I responded that I did not want promotion within the party because I have already been promoted to the rank of sonship with God. I told him that my hope was not based on the material things of this world but on the spiritual things in heaven, an everlasting life and the kingdom of God."¹⁵⁵

Despite the political agenda of Derg meetings, unguarded comments from local officials occasionally encouraged MKC leaders. In Interview 10, Alemu describes a meeting in which academic participants were writing a history of the city of Nazareth. As participants bragged about Derg accomplishments, one said, "We closed this Pente Church ... MKC. This is a big achievement." Alemu remembers the mayor of the city responding, "This is not something to write in our books, because it is not really true. Yes, we have closed one church, but they have opened more than 20 churches - you know, their home fellowships - so what have we achieved to brag about?" Alemu says, "I was happy. I was in there, listening to a communist leader telling the truth. So they didn't include that in their history. I was really saying, 'Praise the Lord!' in my heart."

¹⁵⁵ Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 39-40; Interviews 9, 11, 18 and 20 also describe refusals to join the Derg party; In Interview 20, Mamo recounts how a cadre, a former Christian, pressured him to join the party, saying, "If you don't join, you must know that one day you may be shot down." Mamo says:

I told him, "You know Jesus. Now you became a cadre. But I don't want to abandon Jesus. Your people are also being shot down, I know." In the Red Terror, Derg members were being killed everywhere, and I told him, "You had better, yourself, come back to Jesus." And he said, "Okay, I will report to the higher authorities about your refusal." "Okay, you can report." And a person above him, after 15 days, asked me, "Why did you speak like that? If you don't adjust yourself, take care. We'll take an action." "No. No problem. Still I will not change my mind," I told him. Well later on, both of them - the first one and his boss - were detained for political reasons. So I became safe. Then the labour union leaders came again to discuss about this, to join their group. After a one and a half hour discussion I told them, "This is my stand. Please leave me free." And they left me.

MKC leaders consistently explain their rationale for refusing party membership in light of their commitment to Jesus. In Interview 4 Kelile says, "I made a decision to follow the Lord, even unto death. Of course, there were

Although Mamo refused to join the Derg party, he was presented with an opportunity to train as a cadre. Could he hold a position of responsibility in the political structure without compromising his Christian faith? While living and working in Wonji, he was selected for an interview to screen him for acceptance at a Marxist political school in Bulgaria. The opportunity to travel was appealing to him. He says, "I wanted to see Europe...I had never been outside Ethiopia." To prepare for an interview with the school director, he studied Marxism and revolutionary thought. The interview went well until the final question: "What about creation?" Mamo reflects:

I knew this was a very dangerous question, so I said, "Well, I know God created it." They became furious. "Didn't you read the theory of Darwin?" I said, "I have read it, but it didn't convince me." "Go out! Go out!" I left. I knew I lost Bulgaria, and when I was coming out from that room, the other candidates [asked] me, "Did you pass?" "Yes, I passed."

I was happy because I didn't go. Those who went to Bulgaria, some were lost [and did not return to their own] country. Some came back and really became cadres. So I skipped becoming a cadre.¹⁵⁶

Teru reflects on inducements to align oneself with the Derg regime, especially in its early years, and explains her rejection of "opportunities to have very nice paying jobs or to be advanced...in the political sphere." She says:

After receiving Christ I have never had this...worldly desire...to advance my selfish interest. That has never been my interest. It has always for the cause of Christ and his kingdom that I live. People want to get higher in their position, and so they compromise or they give up their Christian values, but I have always enjoyed working for Christ, even though I haven't had advantages as such...I don't have anything to boast or brag about. It's God's grace and strength that has enabled me to follow his way and do his bidding, so it has never been too hard for me. Because of God's help, God's presence, I have kept the faith and I have gone this far with the Lord.¹⁵⁷

v. Participation in the military

How did Meserete Kristos Church leaders respond to the conscription of young people to fight Eritrean, Tigrean and other Derg opponents? The church accepted conscription to some extent, although some leaders risked punishment for their refusal to bear arms and others helped young people evade

possibilities where I could choose to leave the Christian faith and join the political life and activities of the Derg, but I made the decision to stand firm on Christ, being with Christ, and being with the church." In Gemechu Gebre Telila, "History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 46, Yohannes says: "One of the cadres who was previously a member of the MKC and abandoned his faith asked me to join the party. I told him I cannot do that. I cannot serve two masters at a time. Although he threatened me, yet I did not fear. He said, 'You will be executed if you don't join the party.' I answered him, 'It is okay to be executed and to be with Jesus. That would be much better than joining the party and dying without Jesus.'"

¹⁵⁶ Interview 20.

¹⁵⁷ Interview 8; in Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 206, Kassa Agafari reflects on how persecution refined the motivations of evangelical believers and leaders: "When we were dispossessed of material things, we began to reach for spiritual realities. We used to go to church in the hope of gaining material things. Now there is none of that."

military service. Zere recounts his successful attempt to keep eleven young male relatives – aged 16, 17 and 18 years old – who were living at his house from being forced into the army. Jazarah remembers the stress of having her teenage son, recently returned from a hospitalization for his mental health, being taken for military service; fortunately he was released without seeing battle.¹⁵⁸ During an interrogation session in prison, authorities challenged Hakim to save himself by agreeing to fight for his country:

Three majors of the police force were sitting there ... They knew the Mennonite church did not believe in war, so they said, "You are a young man. You are fit. We would like to send you to the north, where they struggle about fighting for your country."

The temptation was at that time to just to say, "I will fight for my country," and so on...I never answered. I kept quiet...He said, "Speak!" No answer. "Okay, what do you believe about peace?" And then I said, "Well about peace, I believe like the chairman, the leader of the Derg." Because these leaders, in a way that's hypocritical, when they do public speaking, they always stand for peace. So I quoted that. I said, "I agree with him, with the comrade...Who is crazy in this era not to believe in peace?"

So one of the majors said..."I am going to...ask you this question: You have somebody...in front of you. You are standing with a gun that has a dagger. And this guy happens to hurt your wife, kill your children. Would you stab him or not, and take out his inner parts?" And of course in Amharic, it was so descriptive, so disgusting. I don't know where I got the response, but I heard myself saying, "Sir. I don't have that kind of enemy. You won't do such a cruel thing and I won't do it." I told him, "You won't do it and I won't do it, as human beings."

"This was an important decision we wanted to make, but you failed," the police major said.

Recognizing that Hakim was an intellectual leader in the prison, the major send someone to persuade Hakim to "Say what they want you to say" even if it was at odds with his actual beliefs. Hakim says, "It was almost a temptation to compromise. But I had to take courage and say, 'No. Whatever I have said, I have said. That's it.'"¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Interviews 13 and 14: Thanks to information from a sympathetic revolutionary guard Zere learned about a planned military recruitment visit and sent the young men away from his home before officers arrived at three o'clock the next morning. Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 137, 161-166, 176-177, and Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 253-254, discuss MKC acquiescence to military service contra Anabaptist Mennonite pacifist traditions. This stance should be understood in light of the historical absence of conscientious objection in Ethiopia, nationalist pressures, and relative lack of time for the church to wrestle with the relationship between nonviolence, Christian faith and citizenship obligations in its context. In 1965, Hege notes, the MKC executive committee adapted the Mennonite Confession of Faith article on nonresistance to read that the church believes in the principle of love for all peoples.

¹⁵⁹ Interview 16; Because of Hakim's refusal to allow a gap between his personal and public commitments, a letter was written, accusing him of being "against the revolution," and marking him for execution. A similar order was given against another MKC leader at the same time. They were spared when a government informant in the prison verified that they had no connections to the American Central Intelligence Agency. Hakim reflects on temptations to compromise one's faith and the grace of God: "...the temptation for compromise was always there. Somehow by the grace of the Lord, we didn't do it...also, you know, the Lord understands our weakness, if you compromise. Peter compromised. He became the greatest leader. So I am not that proud for not compromising, but the grace of the Lord did it." Another example of an MKC leader refusing military service is found in Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 179-180. After describing a series of short imprisonments because of his Christian faith, Ijigu Woldegebriel says,

The final time I was detained, they asked me to carry a gun and serve as a military guard in the area. When I got wind of this, I left home. So they put my father in prison and told him that unless I return, they would not

c. Compliance and non-compliance with Derg directives

Keenly aware of the risks involved in defying an authoritarian government, MKC leaders faced various situations in which they chose to disregard directives from the authorities in their desire to be faithful disciples of Jesus. In addition to examples above, they describe i) underage youth leaders trying to sneak into worship services, ii) refusing to carry a weapon as an elected kebele leader, iii) insisting on the right to carry a Bible, and iv) refusing to take part in revolutionary singing and dancing.

i. Sneaking into worship

Before the closure of MKC in 1982, everyone under the age of thirty years was prohibited from attending church programs. Four interviewees tried to circumvent that rule. A bit younger than the required age, Zere successfully altered his identification card so that he appeared to be 32 years old, enabling him to take part in worship and serve as a choir member. Nyala tried to enter MKC property, but was caught and imprisoned for a day. In their late teens and early 20s, Abebech and Teru disguised themselves in clothing borrowed from elderly women in the hope of fooling onlookers into thinking they were old enough to enter the church premises. Teru says that she and her friends tried this strategy three times, but each time were discovered and severely beaten.¹⁶⁰

ii. Refusal to carry a gun

When Yacob was elected to a two-year term as a kebele leader in the early years of the revolution, Derg authorities gave him an AK 47 Kalashnikov rifle to defend himself. He says, "I took the gun and hid it in the closet in the house. I just went out in the evening to town without any gun, even though they told me to carry it around and threaten people with it." The officials confronted him: "We gave you a gun. Why don't you use it? Why don't you carry it with you?" Yacob responded, "What's the use of carrying a gun? If I carry one, they can come from behind and kill me, and shoot me. It's God who protects me." He adds, "I

release him. My sister sent word to me that my father was in prison. So I went and surrendered myself, and they released him. They wanted me to swear allegiance to the revolution. I told them I didn't have time for it along with my responsibilities. Finally, they asked for my identity card. They took off the photo and gave it to me, tore up the card, threw it in the wastebasket, and said, "From now on you are not a resident of this kebele. We don't know you; get out of here." God took care of me.

¹⁶⁰ Interviews 8, 10, 12 and 13; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 175 also refers to young women trying to disguise their youth by wearing older women's clothing in order to gain access to church events.

also told them, 'I don't want to kill anyone.'" He retrieved the gun and returned it to them, saying, "It's not the gun you gave me that protects me. It's God who protects me, so I don't need it."¹⁶¹

iii. Insisting on the right to carry a Bible

Before the closure of MKC, Negash Kebede returned to Ethiopia after two years in the United States. Forgetting to be careful, he taught with an open Bible at a prayer meeting in Nazareth. He was surprised when five guards arrived and took the group to kebele headquarters for questioning. Hege writes: "Negash argued with the guards, insisting on his right to teach the Bible; his brothers frantically tried to keep him quiet. 'It is not wise to argue with the guards,' they said. A higher official eventually released the group, explaining that 'a new ruling now allows people to carry Bibles.'"¹⁶²

iv. Refusing to take part in revolutionary singing and dancing

When leaders of the Wonji Women's Association organized women into groups for drama, revolutionary dancing and shop keeping, they selected Christians to act and dance. Convinced that the leaders were seeking personal promotion by accusing and mocking those perceived to be enemies of the revolution, the Christians refused to take part, saying that they were called to sing for only "our Lord Jesus who is our Lord and master of all." Belynes Tesbome challenged the association leader: "Would you agree to let me take President Mengistu's cup and give it to one of the soldiers to drink from it? If I did this, could I gain favor with the President?" The leader shouted, "No, you are not allowed to do that." Belynes explained, "It is the same way for me. I am sorry, but we cannot dance or sing." She and other MKC women were incarcerated. After ten days, they were again interrogated and received Marxist instruction. When they continued to hold firm to their faith, cadres shouted at them and sent the group back to prison. On the way, the women sang:

God's mercy is endless; His love endures forever.
He has shown us the power of his salvation.
He has visited us with mighty power.
Present to Him sweet-smelling thanksgiving,
With great respect bow down before him.

By the river of Babylon there we sat down and wept
When we remembered Zion.
On the willows we hung our harps.

¹⁶¹ Interview 7.

¹⁶² Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 195.

For our captors asked us for songs
and our tormentors asked for mirth,
saying. "Sing us one of the songs of Zion."
How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?¹⁶³

d. Responding to attempts to shut down ministry

MKC leaders faced a variety of attempts to disrupt and stop the ministry of the church. At times they adjusted their plans rather than directly challenge authorities; on other occasions they protested unjust restrictions. Zinna Tuke remembers an MKC cell leader in Wonji who objected to the arrest of his group:

A cell group was caught while they were praying and studying the Bible, and the soldiers took them to the town dwellers association office. They asked, "Why do you meet? You know this is forbidden." The group leader said, "No. The Muslim and Orthodox believers are worshipping openly, so why should we be deprived of our right to worship God." He told the soldiers they would continue to openly worship the Lord.¹⁶⁴

Fikru Zeleke challenged authorities who wanted to restrict his ministry, based on his commission from Jesus. Summoned to appear at a regional security office in November 1985, he was interrogated by an officer who placed a pistol on a table, trying to intimidate him. With secretaries typing in the background,

¹⁶³ Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 30-33; For Belynesh and the other women, the Marxist indoctrination continued for fifteen days. Despite the emotional and physical pressures of a small, crowded prison cell with temperatures topping 100°F, Belynesh testifies that the women remained happy and confident. She says, "We had good time with our Lord in prayer, and we had plenty of opportunity to discuss our faith and to get to know each other. God changed the cell itself into a suitable and comfortable place for us. Astonishingly, all of us were in good health. We had overflowing joy and immeasurable peace." Gemechu comments:

Belynesh reflects upon how she and the other Christian women with her held firmly "to the trustworthy message that they heard and learned." In recalling her experience, she refers to Paul's teaching to Timothy: "The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful - for he cannot deny himself" (2 Timothy 2:11-13).

¹⁶⁴ Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 34-37, describes an incident in February 1977 when kebele officials accompanied by armed militia entered the Wonji Gefersa MKC building while two choirs were practicing and women's groups were studying the Bible and praying. Shouting insults and accusations, the authorities arrested everyone present and marched them to prison where they were segregated by gender and locked in small cells. When church elders, husbands and fathers came to advocate on behalf of those arrested, the kebele chairman berated them: "Don't you know that this is the time for socialism? We don't want youngsters to be spoiled with anti-socialist ideology. We want your children to stop going to church. Do you know what precious gifts they are to our socialist Ethiopia?" After accusing MKC of harboring EPRP loyalists in its membership, the chairman added: "We put the revolution first. We sacrifice so that the people of socialist Ethiopia may prosper. We need a pure socialist Ethiopia free from mixed ideology....Don't you know that we are not at liberty to tolerate any religious questions at all?" A church elder tried to convince kebele officials that MKC members were not enemies of the government: "We love our country. We work for the benefit of our country. As Christians we are faithful to God and also faithful to our country. We don't want anyone to simply disregard our faith...We are not EPRP members, and I assure you that none of our church members are. Our God is the God of peace and justice, and we are also the people of peace and justice."

Unresponsive to these attempts to explain the church's position, kebele officials spent four hours warning and threatening those arrested before releasing them. After this they began to schedule socialist gatherings within the church compound on Sunday mornings in order to disrupt its worship. In response, the congregation began to meet for worship on Saturdays and, when possible, Sunday afternoons; church leaders also worked to strengthen home prayer and visitation programmes. Abera Ertiro, "Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth," 25-26 describes the strengthening of pastoral care ministry in the Nazareth church during the same period.

Fikru was accused of spreading an outlawed religion. He remembers: "From the time I entered the man's presence, a special power came upon me which was not of my own – something I had not experienced before. So I began to dispute with him. I told him I'm preaching a permitted gospel and that I have permission to do so." Citing a government order for the closing of MKC, the officer pronounced him a criminal, but Fikru answered, "I have permission from the King of kings." When asked for evidence, he pulled a small Bible from his pocket and read from Matthew 28:18-19: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." Angry, the guard slapped Fikru on the face. After ten hours of debate, Fikru was released on the condition that he would not invite anyone to his home for teaching. He insisted, however, that he would welcome and teach anyone who came to his house on their own initiative. "It is the power of the Spirit that sends people forth with the gospel. This I have learned," Fikru testifies.¹⁶⁵

e. Political minefields in the workplace

Employees in government-controlled business and industry faced considerable pressure to conform to expectations for loyal revolutionary citizens. How did MKC leaders try to maintain their integrity within this coercive system? How far could they advance in their careers without compromising their Christian faith? At what points were they tempted to let external considerations override their core values? When Kelile lost his job at Nazareth Bible Academy, he was assigned work as an accountant at a paper mill. He says:

I prayed that my life would be a witness to the gospel and to Christ, and that in my life, my honesty and integrity ... everybody would know that I am a Christian.

At one point they [said] that you shouldn't really mention God or Christ in any situation. And people would come to me at the paper factory and would say, "Good morning, Kelile," and I would say, "Thank God, I am fine, I am well." Afterwards, some people came to my office and said, "Please don't mention God. They'll put you in prison." I said, "Well, that's what I believe and I'll stick to that to the end."

Kelile marvels at the grace of God, who gave him favour among the paper mill workers: "If there was any conflict, if there was anything difficult, they would say, 'We want Kelile in this case, because he

¹⁶⁵ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 199-201.

has the ability to reconcile and make peace among people.' That was a gift from God that I have observed, that God has given me this, and I thank God for being his witness at work."¹⁶⁶

Bekele describes an experience in 1978 in which his commitment to truth-telling at work made him a target for false accusations, arrest, threats of torture and potential execution. As part of his job, he was assigned responsibility for facilitating the transfer of the Nazareth hospital from the Mennonite Mission to the government. In the process, a hospital employee who belonged to the Derg party asked him to falsify documents to indicate that employees' salary and benefits were significantly higher than they really were. Bekele and his transition team said, "No. You know us. We are Christians. We can't do this."

When the man saw Bekele and other MKC members at a kebele political gathering, he stood up and told the assembly, "There are some people in this meeting who are really CIA agents and we need to fight these people!" Bekele understood that he was talking about him and other Christians who had been involved in the hospital transfer process. He raised his hand for permission to speak, but his accuser told the chairperson to ignore him. Bekele insisted, "No, this is my democratic right." When the chairperson gave him the floor, Bekele said,

I know what this brother is talking about. He is talking against me and other Christians here, but I think the public has to know there is a hidden issue here... We are in the process of handing over this hospital to the government, and you know this guy is working there. He asked us to submit false documents to the government so that they can get benefits which they were not getting here now. So this is my value, my belief that we cannot do this. We cannot cheat the government, favouring individuals...

Bekele's accuser left the gathering upset, as public sentiment turned against him. About 6:30 p.m. Bekele received a visitor, "a Christian from our church" who, unbeknownst to him and his family, turned out to be "a member of the party." At first, Bekele says, "We thought he just came to visit us." His guest, however, addressed him as though he were a sympathizer of the EPRP or another radical communist group: "Bekele, I think they want you at the kebele, but I told them, before they take you to the kebele, I will talk to you and if you could give me some of the papers from those opposition groups, you know, what you have at home..." Bekele was shocked: "I didn't expect that this guy was with these people. I thought he was with us." He replied, "Do you think I have those papers with me?" "Yeah, I know some people have said that," his guest answered. Bekele retorted, "How would they know? I have not read even one paper from

¹⁶⁶ Interview 4; commenting on Kelile's faithfulness and honesty, some of the cadres told him, "Oh, we wish you were a member of our political party. You are so clean and a good witness." He responded, "I have a master that I serve and I can't serve two masters. I serve the Lord, so I can't be a member of your party."

[an opposition group]. Why would I read it? I don't have anything." His guest persisted, "Please. Otherwise you will be in trouble." "Let anything come," Bekele responded. While he was talking, two armed revolutionary guards arrived to arrest him.

In his account of this incident, Bekele faces a series of risky situations in which his commitment to truth-telling overrides any calculation about personal safety. His refusal to falsify a document triggers a personal attack on him in front of a crowd. His public exposure of his accuser's scheme elicits support from sympathetic hearers, but escalates the conflict. His straightforward denial of involvement with the EPRP neither prevents nor contributes to his arrest. Later, in custody, Bekele would remember an ally in authority who will vindicate his honesty. Even so, he was willing to die speaking the truth, if necessary.¹⁶⁷

For Desta, Christian faith meant that as teacher, she would identify with those of lower social status on her school campus – the guards – rather than claim the perks received by colleagues who embraced Marxism. As teachers were being recruited to join the government party and become cadres, they were invited to stand together. Desta, however, stood with the school guards, who would not have been valued as party members:

I stood with the guards and praised God, "God, I thank you for giving me the strength to say that I am a Christian, that I am your follower." The others were all ready to give up whatever they had in their heart. They were willing to serve the new ideology...but I stood with those that were not wanted...the guards...So I was sort of despised. I was a teacher, but they sort of looked down upon me.

Desta recognizes that she would probably not have been wanted as a cadre, because if she had been recruited, "I would talk about my belief in Jesus and that would really adulterate their [message]. So, I was willing to stand with those that were despised."¹⁶⁸

As a department head at a coffee plantation corporation, Solomon gave leadership to travelling company teams as they visited coffee fields. In the process he met with scattered church members and

¹⁶⁷ Interview 22: Bekele was taken to a small room at the kebele compound. At 11:00 pm the hospital employee who accused him of working for the CIA arrived and said "We will see what will happen this night." Bekele told him, "I don't care. I know, even if I die, I know where I am going, but I don't think God will allow you to do anything on me." Angry, the man left to talk to other cadres. In that moment, Bekele remembered a distant connection he had with the leader of the kebele security force. He asked a soldier if he could talk with his wife, who was waiting outside the building with other Christians. When she came in, he asked her to contact the official and tell him what was happening. Although the commander was not a Christian, he took her call, expressed his shock, and arrived at the jail within ten minutes. Bekele remembers: "He just came and I heard him say, 'Where is Bekele? Where is Bekele?' So when they saw [this], everybody was hiding, because he was the chief. Imagine. Finally he found me, and he said, 'Who brought you here?' I told him...he said, 'Come out.' He called that guy, the guy who told the soldiers to bring me to the kebele ...He put him in prison, and he told me, 'Go home now.' So I went."

¹⁶⁸ Interview 11.

shared his faith with nonbelievers. When a report of his Christian activities reached a government party office, Solomon was summoned to Addis Ababa for interrogation. Aware of his evangelical faith, the secretary of a government minister wanted to trap him; he arranged for a cadre to assign Solomon to teach a session on political economy at an workplace indoctrination session the following week. Already highly conversant in Marxist philosophy, Solomon says, “I got prepared. They thought that I am quiet...I am shy ...but they did not know that I speak in the church.” When Solomon taught the lesson, the group said, “We have never learned this like this before” and the cadre added, “We want people like this to be part of the party.” Solomon recognized that it would be dangerous to continue attending this group: “If I kept coming, next time here I am going to be put in a trap.”

As part of a committee in the government’s Ministry of Coffee and Tea, Solomon asked that group to change its weekly meeting time to coincide with the political meeting he wanted to avoid. The committee agreed and Solomon began to attend indoctrination sessions with a different group. Those in charge of the first group began looking for him. He says: “They put a charge against me that I am not attending. But when...I was called and I was challenged that I was not attending the meeting, I said, ‘No, I have been meeting. I have not missed any meetings.’”

“How come? You didn't attend.”

“Oh, during this time, I was in the committee, but instead I have gone to another committee.”

Although he was excused, Solomon says, “These people were following me, and after a while I left the coffee plantation corporation.”¹⁶⁹

5. Self-leadership

As noted above,¹⁷⁰ MKC leaders understood the effectiveness of their leadership to rest on the integrity of their own example. Their ability to teach, mentor and positively influence others depended on their personal faithfulness to Jesus Christ. Selassie points out that “Leaders are [at the] forefront. They are ...visible...They need to exhibit those qualities that the flock needs to see.” Desta emphasizes the importance of a leader’s determination “to live for Christ, whatever the circumstance,” and expresses her admiration for leaders who “really tried hard to...keep God's people together with the example of their

¹⁶⁹ Interview 18.

¹⁷⁰ Section A.2.c.ii.5, “Example.”

lives,” adding that “a leader has to be resolute. He has to be...a good example in the way he lives” and how “he conducts himself.” Teku explains the importance of leading by example: “When a leader speaks... whether it is individually or in a group...people are looking at what [he or she] is doing. So if what he or she had spoken and his practical life is contradictory, they withdraw. They can be offended. Therefore, having an exemplary life is the best thing.”¹⁷¹

Dawit stresses that for leadership to have integrity and power, one needs to first lead oneself, saying, “Every person who can lead himself...can be a leader.” Describing the chain of influence between one person and another, he says, “Leading started from you. I learned that.” In the time of persecution, he says, “Everybody...was leading themselves, their family, and then when they went out, [this became] their example for leading. That is life.” What is involved in self-leadership? Dawit says, “You have to be a disciplined person; discipline yourself and be patient and respect others and not just to be in front. Most of the time we just [say], ‘Do this,’ and ‘Do this,’ instead of ‘Do this,’ doing and leading. Then instead of ‘Pray,’ you pray. People start praying. Instead of ‘Do this. You do that.’” When you lead yourself first, Dawit observes, “Others follow you...your pattern...People follow you if you are just, if you lead yourself in the right way. So leadership is not a matter of having a degree, a master's or such. It's a matter of life.”

Teku's priorities also reflect an understanding that self-leadership anchors his leadership of others: “I was striving towards making myself the disciple of Christ, and by the knowledge and strength that I received from God, I was also encouraging others to be the disciples of Jesus Christ. That was my greatest intention. And so this subjugated me and I was working towards helping other people.”¹⁷²

A number of interviewees identify personal perseverance as a crucial element of leaders' example while under persecution. Alemu says, “I think perseverance is a quality that is needed, not wavering when things are tough. [Leaders] should stand firm and the others...will find him as a good example when he

¹⁷¹ Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 249; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 45; Lehman, “Aster Debossie,” 23; Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21. Expressing appreciation for MKC leaders in the Derg era, in Interview 21 Teku says, “I can say that their internal strength, their ethical life was very dynamic, when I compare with the contemporary condition.” In Interview 7 Yacob acknowledges the pressure of Marxist propaganda on believers, and expresses that he wanted to provide an integrated witness to others: “My earnest desire...was to really encourage the members....The cadres were going around saying, “God doesn't exist. You shouldn't believe. It's just the opiate of the people.” And I was trying, through the example of my life and through teaching and preaching, to strengthen them to stick to their faith to the end. That was my aim and my desire, my objective.” In Interview 9 Louam says, “the example of our teachers, of our leaders...really helped me a lot in my fighting with Marxist-Leninist ideology.”

¹⁷² Interviews 1 and 21; In Interview 8, Teru likewise insists that: “A leader has to first himself be a man of prayer, a man who loves the Word of God, a man who worships on his own and also with other brothers and Christians. But he has to have a strong dependence on God, and then honouring and glorifying God will certainly follow...”

perseveres.” Earlier in the interview, his wife Abebech describes how Bible reading and prayer gave her “the courage to stand through those testing, withering moments,” coupled with her desire to be “an exemplary servant to the Lord” who “didn't want to be running in vain.” She adds, “I wanted to stand to the end and be a good example to others. So that helped me not to compromise. And also the fact that I was going around and visiting homes and serving them gave me the life that I should show to others.”¹⁷³

6. Persecution as a crucible for spiritual formation

Meserete Kristos Church leaders characterize the impact of persecution on their relationship with God, character development and spiritual formation in highly positive terms. Their commitment to act according to internal conviction rather than acquiesce to external pressure was anchored in a desire to remain faithful to Jesus Christ. Desta says: “There were only two choices: one, to stand with Christ; the other one would be to leave following Jesus and join the socialist ideology. So I decided to stick with my Lord, to cling to him, and to be obedient to my Lord and serve him...it was through the grace of God...that I was able to go through those hard times.”¹⁷⁴

Persecution became a crucible for spiritual refining. Tenge speaks about this process in his own life and in the church:

As iron is tested or tried through fire and when it is refined it becomes stronger, all that persecution, all that trouble, all that strengthened us instead of weakened us...I came to really know the Lord personally and cling to him. So I really praise the Lord that he helped me go through those difficult times. As Paul says in Romans 8:28: to those that love the Lord and are called by him, everything goes well together for them. And as it is also explained in there, the purpose is to be like the Son, like Christ. So it has really made us like Christ.¹⁷⁵

For Berihun, persecution became a rich opportunity for the purposes of God to be advanced in the church and among nonbelievers. He emphasizes the spiritual formation of the church as it participated in the suffering of Jesus Christ and experienced the goodness of God while under hardship. Being “dispossessed” led to being “filled” and being “cornered” led to the church to “look up”:

¹⁷³ Interview 10; the need for perseverance is also mentioned in Interviews 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19 and 21; In Interview 13 Zere mentions dreams that spurred his motivation to persist as a faithful leader: “I had dreams that in the future the Lord would have an army of believers. And we were leaders, as examples to others, the way we lived, the way we talked, so what we said we tried to live by example, and we felt that the Lord would really bring us out as a host of an army of believers...So it was the Lord who really gave us the grace and gave us the strength to stay in the church through all those years of difficulty.”

¹⁷⁴ Interview 11.

¹⁷⁵ Interview 19; In Interview 4, Kelile acknowledges both the emotional heaviness of the persecution era and the provision of God, saying, “After the closure of the church, there was not really a time when I could really have a belly laugh, you know...but I really noticed that the Lord delivers us, is with us and never forsakes us, so my relationship with God has been strengthened despite the difficulties.”

Persecution is a means by which God reveals himself to the ones who are persecuted and the ones who need his salvation. He guides his children in a way that they would glorify him. Sometimes he works in mysterious ways. When God dispossesses his children of their belongings, he would fill them with his love and strength: Dispossess, fill with love and strength. So God dispossessed MKC and he filled us with love and strength to do the ministry that he has called us to do. That's what God did. He put us to zero level: nothing that we can glory of. Our bank account was frozen. All buildings were taken and possessions confiscated. We were cornered, like Pharaoh following the Israelites and they were facing the Red Sea. They didn't have any choice to run away. They couldn't do that because the Egyptians had chariots and warriors. So they had only one choice: look up.

As the church is partaker of the divine nature, so also it is a partaker of Christ's suffering (1 Peter 4:13); when persecution comes upon the church, [it has the]...privilege of being partakers of Christ's suffering. So during persecution, God is going to do a new thing. Sometimes it is hard to understand. He can use unexpected ways, means and people.¹⁷⁶

Gemechu discusses MKC believers' commitment to be directed by their love for God rather than the external pressures of persecution, while noting that the adverse circumstances highlighted the integrity of their witness:

Believers...stressed the expectation that they never compromise God's holiness. They maintained that love for God and his will as revealed in his word must control and direct their love for others. Love for God must always be first.

Christians developed the conviction that the greater the pressure imposed by the Communists, the more appealing their holy living appeared to their neighbors. They believed that their boldness in witnessing penetrated the fallacies of Communist atheism. They interpreted identification with a church experiencing persecution as a form of deliverance. To them, persecution had become a powerful tool for bringing the lost into the community of God's kingdom.¹⁷⁷

C. Love: Attractive, gracious relationships

In normal human functioning, according to Quinn, people focus on themselves, prioritizing their own interests above others and the organizations in which they are involved. Transformational leadership, however, depends on productive collaboration, putting the welfare of others ahead of one's own in pursuit of the common good. Three interview questions invite research participants to consider their relationships with leadership team members, with the church as a whole, and with persecutors.¹⁷⁸ This analysis also draws on other relevant portions of interviews, written and video sources. How did MKC leaders prioritize the needs of others and practice love in the midst of persecution? This section explores 1) leaders'

¹⁷⁶ Interview 3; Between the two paragraphs cited here, Berihun says: "And that was the situation that MKC faced in those days, when MKC went through severe persecution, when almost all top leaders were imprisoned and everything was taken over - bank accounts, schools, hospitals, development, and all buildings and all capital was frozen - we turned to God because he was the one, the only One who could give us hope and faith."

¹⁷⁷ Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 65.

¹⁷⁸ "How did you work as a team in those difficult circumstances?" "How did you help others cope with the pressure of persecution? How did the needs of others challenge you as a leader?" "How did you keep your heart open to people who were persecuting the church?"

understandings of humility and love as essential leadership qualities, 2) MKC leadership team experience, 3) relationships in the church, 4) relationships beyond the church, and 5) love for persecutors.

1. Humility and love as essential leadership qualities

It is an act of love to shift focus from self to others. For MKC leaders this is required and empowered by the transformative power of God's love. Berihun, for example, closely connects his "experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit" with a testimony that, "My life was transformed by God's love." As a result, he says, "I had love for Christians and love for the lost ones." Reflecting on the sacrifices of ministry during the era of persecution, including the disruption – almost every day – of welcoming house guests who came to pray and who often needed overnight accommodation, he says: "Unless God's love really fills one's heart, it is very hard to leave those comfort zones. Many really sacrificed themselves for the work of the Lord and the ministry that God entrusted to them, for the church. God is the one who really dealt with my life, to trust him daily, simply, with a child-like faith."¹⁷⁹

Gemechu writes, "The Church desired to serve the Lord Jesus Christ from their hearts and to live in His love."¹⁸⁰ Research participants identify love as a necessary characteristic of a good leader, closely associating it with compassion, patience, humility, respect for others, unselfishness and servant leadership. Solomon Kebede says, "Life in the church is about servanthood, not self-seeking leadership." Referring to "great leaders" like Kedir and Tadesse, Tewodros says: "They were unselfish leaders. They really were humble leaders. They came down to the little places, the huts, without any feeling of being degraded or of

¹⁷⁹ Interview 3; in Interview 21 Teku likewise says, "When I was being filled by the power of the Holy Spirit, I loved God. My spirit, my whole life was motivated in Christ to serve God. I love God's people." In Interview 12 Nyala explains how her hospitality was based on an understanding that her home was not her personal property, but:

It was God's house, a place where God was glorified and honoured, so I never was envious of anybody or anything, you know, why did they break my chairs or...my sofa. It was all God's. Jesus said the Son of Man has no house...the birds have nests, the beasts of the wild have something to stay under, but the Lord didn't have anything. But the Lord wanted to use what we have, so it was Jesus' house...It was the grace of God that really helped me with all these guests coming and going and with the training being conducted here. So many days in the year there was no rest, but the grace of God gave us the strength to give what we had: rooms and food and everything that people needed. So I was really pleased that the Lord was using this place for his work.

¹⁸⁰ Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 57-58, 92; Bible study booklets created by the MKC educational team, such as those based on the Johannine letters and Ephesians, emphasized faithfulness to Christ in the face of the opposition and highlighted the importance of loving, godly relationships within the family, church, workplace and larger world.

being humiliated...So their willingness to sacrifice their physical comfort...to go out of their comfort zone and serve the people humbly...really being a servant leader: that's what I admire..."¹⁸¹

Hakim discusses the lack of integrity that ensues when leaders seek personal gain rather than the purposes of God and the well-being of others. He contrasts the temptations of contemporary ministry in Ethiopia with the experience of the Derg era when persecution stripped away fringe benefits of leadership that could trigger ulterior motives: "I think personally the challenge when you become a leader is to keep the proper identity, and to know your limits. You can be carried when you become a leader to conclude, 'It's all about me.' That's a big challenge. So we have to constantly remind ourselves, 'It's not all about me'...That's a challenge for me as well as for many, many leaders in the church." Whereas some currently consider ministry to be "a lucrative business" (in part because of financial support from abroad), Hakim says, "They miss the point. They don't have any agenda except getting a job." In the persecution era, however, there was little temptation to be involved in church leadership for selfish motives.¹⁸²

2. Meserete Kristos Church leadership team experience

Research participants characterize their experiences on MKC leadership teams positively, identifying a) valued and productive team relationships, b) stressful situations faced together, c) patterns of support and accountability among team members, d) the management of differences among leaders to produce growth, and e) shared recreation.

¹⁸¹ Showalter, "Like Grains of Wheat," 22-23; Interviews 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16; Interview 12: "He was... compassionate...loving and...humble." Interview 13: "What I appreciate from other leaders was their love, their wisdom, their humility." Also, "love and humility and respect for others." Interview 14: "...our leaders...were very understanding, caring, loving." Interview 19: "at that time there was no servant-master kind of relationship because God was the real leader, master. So the leader had to be faithful to his work." In Interview 1 Dawit also emphasizes the importance of humility and dependence on the Holy Spirit for Christian leadership: "No one can be a leader without the Holy Spirit...he used [us] by changing our mind and...[putting] his work in us, in different [people]...He is the one who leads us, and nobody can say, 'I was the leader!'" [Emphasis on *I*]...It's the Holy Spirit who led us. So, if you want to be a leader: lead by the Holy Spirit. You will be a good leader."

¹⁸² Interview 16; in Interview 1 Dawit argues that leaders who have integrity always seek the best for others. Problems come when leaders seek personal gain, focusing on "What for me?" Reflecting back, he says: "During that time we didn't have any 'What for me's.' We were always for the others. So 'One Year for Christ' guys: most of them served the church without any penny because they're for Christ." In Interview 18 Solomon notes that "when people are in the church for power, for gain," they "sow discord." "Unless they get what they want, they will cause problems in the church." During the persecution era, however "The people with those ambitions ran away from the church." In a sifting process: "Only those who made business with the Lord, who were ready to pay the price stayed, so it was excellent, and it was full of love. When you see a friend somewhere, you get energized, a Christian brother – even when you see him pass by while crossing the road, just by seeing him. At that time it was excellent."

In Interview 20 Mamo remembers that there was no ethnic tension in the church during the Derg years; instead, "The Holy Spirit kept us together."

a. Valued and productive team relationships

Interviewees consistently testify that during the Derg years their MKC leadership team relationships were marked by love, mutual acceptance, understanding, grace and unity as they worked together toward common purposes. Alemu's comments are typical: "I appreciate our togetherness as leadership teams. We worked. We would do our regular jobs during the day. We would teach or work in the hospital or wherever, and then at night we would meet together. We would be, of course, physically exhausted, but we were willing to sacrifice our sleep and work for the benefit of our members..." He adds that "Working with faithful and dedicated leaders," meant "you could trust them." With love and concern for each other, "We came together and worked hard without any financial benefits." Solomon considers how an absence of selfish ambition among MKC leaders during the Derg era enabled them to work together harmoniously:

People get easily divided when they put their personal things ahead; for example when people look for power, for recognition or for benefits. Then division easily comes. But [in] that time...If you want to benefit, you run away from the church. If you wanted power, you run away from the church and become a party member. That way you would benefit a lot. So staying...there is not that temptation.¹⁸³

Berihun emphasizes that love between leaders was grounded in honest communication, humility, spiritual vitality and shared passion for building up others:

There was transparency of speech and understanding. The leaders considered themselves as servants. This is what made the whole difference in those days and years. It was also customary for all committee members to come together for days in every month for prayer and fasting and admonishing. So, we were knit together. Really, that's that work of God, and we had one aim, one purpose and we had a focused goal; and we built ourselves by the Word of God, praying one for another, and focus for preparing the full person in the image of God: the leaders and potential leaders and church members, to equip them for the ministry to which they are called.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Interviews 10 and 18; Contrasting the situation under persecution with the contemporary situation in which leaders are tempted to claim titles like "pastor" or "prophet" as status markers, Solomon says, "During that time, you hide. You don't run for that. If it comes, you say, 'I cannot escape it.' So...if not a matter of life and death, it's a matter of suffering and life. It was like that. So, we used to work in teams. There was no temptation for division." Similarly, in Interview 8, Teru says: "we worked as a body, as a group, in love and accepting each other...being willing to serve each other humbly. There was true love. Now we see so much wrangling for position, people wanting this or that now. But during those years all of us leaders worked together as a family."

In Interview 16, Hakim also contrasts the unity of leaders in the Derg era with conditions under greater freedom in which differences between leaders are magnified and many are preoccupied with finances: "The church's affair was the concern of everybody. It was a major agenda. People left their career, and came to the church. It was a special time of reformation. So it was easy to work together. Leaders: no cult in those days, no powerful preacher. [Nobody would] say, 'Oh, I am a follower of...'" Teku, in Interview 21, likewise says, "It was an excellent time...for working as a team. When I compare the contemporary condition and the persecution condition...as far as team-working is concerned, I pray for the persecution time."

¹⁸⁴ Interview 3; In Interview 6 Tewodros also stresses open communication among team members: "...one quality that is necessary for leaders [is]...to really have unity, to come together as Christian leaders and discuss things

MKC leaders worked together in a variety of team configurations: ministry pairs, choirs, visitation and evangelism groups, cell leader, pastoral care and elder teams, program committees, writing teams and oversight bodies for local churches and the denomination. Semer remembers how evangelists and elders worked together in ministry pairs:

We worked together in unity. We were yoked...two people: one from the evangelists, one from the elders. We had a number of teams like that. And we went and visited the different cell groups in different homes. If people were sick we would go and pray for them, and encourage them. When we realized that there was...a bereaved family...we would go and comfort them. So there was this teamwork, two by two. We went even...far away from our homes, like three, four kilometres away, at night, mostly in the dark. We went and visited...We trusted each other...We weren't afraid of being betrayed...there was love and acceptance, working together in trust and in good faith.¹⁸⁵

Leaders put high priority on gathering for mutual encouragement, learning and planning. Desta describes how believers, especially those in leadership, would travel up to four hundred kilometres to spend a week at her home “to learn from the Word of God and to pray and fast together...to talk and plan how to do the work together,” adding that “there was real understanding and real friendship amongst us.”¹⁸⁶ Alemu describes the work of his local elder team. Usually meeting at night, the group would discuss how members were doing, plan for visitation, communion and other ministries. He says, “We loved each other and we kept together, even though the challenges were tough...I think we had very useful and very helpful meetings, working as a team.”¹⁸⁷ Dawit remembers that the MKC Evangelism Committee met every two months, beginning meetings with a significant time of prayer and then reporting of the church’s ministry from various regions. Highlighting differences between industrial, rural and urban ministry contexts, Dawit says, “We learned from each other.” After that, the group “discussed how to lead the church as a whole,”

in love and perseverance...So with open hearts to each other, and able to communicate freely as leaders in those difficult times, those are some of the qualities that are needed.”

¹⁸⁵ Interview 15.

¹⁸⁶ Interview 11; Desta adds: “There was much love, and as a team we worked together with understanding, accepting each other. We discussed things amicably...there was really understanding, no fighting amongst the leaders. It was a time that brought us together as Christian leaders.” In Interview 8 Teru describes how the love shared among leaders extended well beyond working together on ministry agenda: “When one of us would get sick, we would pray for that person, we would help that person in any way we could.”

¹⁸⁷ Interview 10; In Interview 14 Jazarah remembers, “We worked as a team in love and in unity...as leaders, we heard many, many problems that our members were facing, and we came together to try to solve [them]...You know, they were imprisoned or they were being ridiculed. Together we discussed what measures we should take. And we went to those authorities that could help in solving those issues. So in general we worked really harmoniously in those years.” In Interview 6 Tewodros also mentions that as an elder team, “We would meet in one of our member’s house and talk about how we should go to the different cell groups and teach the Bible and pray with the members.”

including vision, finances, church policy, leadership strategy and development, support for imprisoned leaders, and guidelines to protect cell groups from being discovered by the authorities.¹⁸⁸

Meetings not only enabled leaders to tackle the business of the church together; they also received great personal encouragement in these times. Lema describes monthly meetings between leaders responsible for organizing churches in different regions of Ethiopia:

I was in charge of Addis. Gash Kedir was in charge of the Rift Valley churches. Seyoum was in charge of Nazareth and Wonji, Wonji Shoa. Once a month we gathered together and shared what was going on around the city. That kind of counsel and sharing vision to spread to different areas also helped us to strengthen the local churches wherever they were. So such kinds of things: discussing together, praying together, sharing vision together: that enlightens us to work together. "I am not the only one. So and so is working down there. So and so is working down there. I am not the only one."¹⁸⁹

Nyala and Teru highlight the collegial and respectful example set by leaders like evangelist Kedir. Nyala says that he worked "with other leaders in love and complete understanding." In return, he enjoyed "grace and...acceptance from other leaders" who "listened to him." Not only did they keep "each other's spirits well," God enabled them "to do the hard work during the Derg years." Teru, who was present for part of the interview with Nyala, remembers that:

Brother Kedir always initiated ideas...but he would never implement them without full discussion with other leaders...most of the time his idea would be implemented...but he always brought it to the team of leaders. He didn't do it like a dictator: "Just do this or do that"...He wanted people to think about it, express their opinions on it, and finally the resolution would be the team resolution.

Kedir also welcomed initiative in others:

...he was open to listen to people's views and ideas, and...never rejected people's ideas when they suggested or recommended something. He would listen and then finally...express it in his own way in the team. People who suggested or recommended the ideas would understand it was their idea that he had framed...so that people would accept it or understand. So there was give and take.¹⁹⁰

Teku remembers valuable teaching on healthy group process in a session on leadership and management in the MKC Key Teachers Training Program. One assigned article emphasized that after

¹⁸⁸ Interviews 1 and 20.

¹⁸⁹ Interview 17; in Interview 10 Alemu gives thanks that through "team leadership, God was helping us to care of the flock. We didn't feel left out. We had friends who stood by our side and we felt God's presence."

¹⁹⁰ Interview 12; In Interview 3 Berihun emphasizes that as chairperson of the MKC Evangelism Committee he "did not do things according to my own decision" but "we decided in a committee." He remembers "we were of one mind, one soul, one spirit, one goal." In Interview 13 Zere says:

We really had love for each other and we respected each other, especially the ones who were greater, or higher status leaders; I mean the ones like Pastor Kedir and so on. But we worked together. There was no argument as such, no back-biting, nothing. It was not just the leaders amongst us, but even the...members of the congregation. They respected the leaders. They obeyed. When guidance was given, they accepted that. So it was a really time when we accepted each other, respected each other, loved each other, and worked for the kingdom of God together, in unity.

presenting an idea in a meeting, it is no longer one's own. Drawing on Acts 15, in which apostles and elders at the Jerusalem Council "argued for a long time and finally...decided in the power of the Holy Spirit," the author encouraged leadership team members to share their ideas and then understand that they belong "to the group and the Holy Spirit." Reflecting on his natural enthusiasm for his own vision and ideas, Teku explains: "when I brought it to the agenda with the church elders they discussed it. So, my mind became alert...I got ready to accept any decision made by the committee, whether it was by church elders or by full-time ministers...once the agenda is aired, it doesn't belong to me, [but to] the Holy Spirit and the whole group, including me. So this helped me a lot...for any type of decision."¹⁹¹

As seen above, MKC leaders understood the need to call, train and delegate responsibility to others so that the ministry of the church could expand. Nyala remembers the love that motivated leaders to do this. In one case Kedir went out of his way to introduce an impoverished twelve year old girl who had been thrown out of her house to Teru, who was prepared to support and disciple her. Although the timing was inconvenient for him, he "sacrificed in this way" for the benefit of others. Now grown and married to an evangelist, this woman recently expressed her gratitude, with tears saying, "This is how Kedir helped me to grow." In the same interview, Teru observes:

Brother Kedir really was concerned about not just their spiritual life, but also their physical needs, and he helped many, many, but when it was too many for him, then he would find someone who would help him take those people and take care of them. I received a number of them... You know you carry a baby on a strap on the back. He would say, "The strap has broken. I can't carry them. There are too many of them for me." Then I would understand he wants someone to be taken care of. So he found... Christians who could help meet their physical needs as well as their spiritual.¹⁹²

b. Facing stressful situations together

Under conditions of persecution, MKC leaders often faced stressful situations together. Melaku recalls an incident in which participants in an all-night prayer meeting were surrounded by revolutionary

¹⁹¹ Interview 21; considering the importance of surrendering one's insights to the group and to the Holy Spirit, Teku adds that in the fifteenth chapter of Acts, "The Holy Spirit was there while the argument was being done...He was there. Was he listening? Was he observing? He was there because they began in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The meeting was not secular. Finally, they said that, 'We and the Holy Spirit decided.' You see?"

¹⁹² Interviews 12; In Interview 19 Tengene describes how unity among leaders enabled ministry to grow: We worked together to serve those cell groups and house fellowships, organizing those cell groups, by training those leaders who could help us with those responsibilities, using their different gifts and also by training them...Bible study leaders. We had pastoral care leaders. They were volunteering in their spare time... We had...prayer group leaders. We organized all these different groups and worked together in love and harmony.

Alemu Checole, "Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa," 230-231, notes that "when the eyes of the people turned from God to evangelist Daniel, he gave some of the programs to other evangelists. The work of the Holy Spirit was clearly manifested in the ministry of these evangelists."

guards outside the house. Sneaking out in the middle of the night, carrying a pot of sauce, the believers sought refuge at the home of another leader, whose family “opened their gate to them.” He says, “There was a lot of working together...unity and love...that's how we operated in those difficult times.”¹⁹³

When asked to describe a time he was at his best as a leader, Selassie highlighted the strength of the whole church, recounting an incident in which an evangelist in Addis Ababa received an anonymous phone call threatening him and the congregation. “We're coming today,” the caller said. The church was expecting a large crowd for a prayer meeting that evening. The evangelist called Selassie at work: “What shall I do?” Selassie contacted his co-elders, who gathered in his office parking lot, prayed together, discussed their course of action, and decided, “The service should not be disrupted.” After work, the elder team regathered in the church office. News of the threat spread to Christians of other denominations, who came to show their solidarity. Selassie remembers that some believers “were really gung ho,” saying, “We'll see who is going to [disrupt the service]!” Recognizing this response “was more carnal than spiritual,” the elders directed the people: “Don't react in a physical way. Invite them in peacefully and bring them to this office. If you see anybody wanting to see the leaders of the church, we'll talk to them here.” Worship proceeded without interruption as the leadership team waited in the office. Ready to leave at 7:00 p.m., the elders gave their phone numbers to people who remained on site, asking them to call if any problems arose. Selassie concludes:

Nothing happened that day. I think they had plainclothes people there. They looked. We weren't scared...So, I was really happy because of the unity of the leadership. I was happy that the members of the church and the attendees were not scared away. I was happy that the churches there from other denominations were united with us, the people of God. That is more than being me at my best, it was the people of God at best.

So forget Selassie. I am nothing, but the people of God, rallying together, is what impresses me about the body of Christ.¹⁹⁴

c. Patterns of support and accountability among team members

In addition to the warmth of personal friendship, working closely with each other through challenging circumstances, showing mutual respect in decision-making, and support for one another in times of need, MKC leaders also created a culture of mutual care in their team relationships and in the

¹⁹³ Interview 17.

¹⁹⁴ Interview 2.

church by i) taking responsibility for their actions, ii) setting high expectations for discipleship and ministry and creating structures of accountability, and iii) giving and receiving feedback and correction.

i. Taking responsibility for their actions

Yacob and Desta each report an incident in which Nazareth evangelist Tadesse Negewo was preaching at a conference hosted by the Wonji MKC congregation. According to Yacob, unsympathetic young men listening through open windows heard Tadesse say: “If Mengistu Haile Mariam would come and talk you would listen to him, but I am bringing the Word of God, the Creator of heaven and earth, and you should listen. You should give more respect to the Word of God than to the word of Mengistu Haile Mariam.” Desta recalls that Tadesse also told the assembly: “Many...great people have arisen. They have died and they are buried, but our Lord has risen. He is not in the grave. He is in heaven.” Eavesdropping cadres concluded: “This man is trying to undermine our ideology and make his ideology much, much bigger...He is speaking against the revolution.” After Tadesse returned home, local authorities arrested Yacob, an elder in the Wonji church. “Why did you allow this person to speak such words?” they asked him. Detaining him overnight, they said, “You have to bring him. We want to put him in prison.” When Tadesse learned that Yacob was suffering on account of his words, he said, “I should take the responsibility for what I said. I am ready to be imprisoned.” He returned to Wonji and spent three months in jail.¹⁹⁵

ii. High expectations and structures of accountability

From the beginning, MKC leaders set high expectations for themselves and team members regarding Christian discipleship and service. As persecution intensified, however, they developed more structured patterns of accountability for themselves and the church. The intimacy of cell groups removed the possibility that one could hold membership in the church but remain distant from other believers or inactive in ministry. Participants were expected to be growing disciples of Jesus Christ, earnestly practice spiritual disciplines, engage in church life, and share the gospel with nonbelievers. Gemechu observes that the MKC emphasis that every believer, as part of the body of Christ, “has at least one spiritual gift” and “could fill a ministry position suited for their gifting” led members to feel responsible for the church and

¹⁹⁵ Interviews 7 and 11.

accountable for their lives: “Within the cell groups believers felt accountable for their own faith and for the wellbeing of the other members.”¹⁹⁶ Teru says:

We really grew and learned a lot during the period of persecution. We learned our Bible in depth and we prayed fervently; whereas before it was just on Sundays that we came together and worshipped. But in the cell group...there was a follow-up: if people were really attending, if they were really true, genuine Christians. Some of them would go away. They would slip away, so we tried to find out what the problem was. Was it really loss of faith or was it because they were sick? We tried to help the sick. We tried to meet their needs during the persecution, whereas before it wasn't really like that. It was just random.¹⁹⁷

Leaders established reporting procedures to track attendance in cell groups, prayer meetings and other church programs. They distributed and collected sheets for members to record weekly personal Bible reading, what chapters they read and short reflections on what they had learned. Each family was to record the dates on which they had family worship on a monthly form. Cell leaders gathered these reports, shared them in their monthly leadership team updates, and passed them to the Pastoral Care Committee. Leaders also kept lists of pastoral care visits. They came to meetings prepared to report on these and other ministry activities. Kifle recalls his satisfaction and joy when submitting reports as an itinerant evangelist. Returning from his travels, he says, “I had to report what I had done, what the Lord had accomplished through me. When they read the reports...and they glorified God – that was really a time when I felt God was using me, that my time was not wasted, and that I had done what was expected of me from God.”¹⁹⁸

Reporting not only provided accountability among leadership team members, it also facilitated follow-up with church members in need of support. If anyone seemed to be withdrawing from church involvement, leaders would seek them out – sometimes travelling long distances to find out if they were

¹⁹⁶ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 55.

¹⁹⁷ Interview 8; Semer echoes this in Interview 15: “Whereas before we just met on Sundays for worship (mostly)...during the Derg years we studied the Bible together in small groups, and we also prayed together, and we found out easily who was really lagging behind or who was slackening, and we visited them.”

¹⁹⁸ Interviews 5, 10, 12 and 21; Abera Ertiro, “History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth from 1951-2003,” 36-39, reprints copies of report forms. He notes that “Everybody who was able to read” was expected “to read his/her Bible at least once in a year. A believer who read more than once would be rewarded. This system encouraged many members to read their Bible.” It “helped believers to be familiar with their Bible and grow with the knowledge of word of God. In their weekly report they would share what God had taught them in their reading.” In addition, they memorized a verse to share at their weekly cell meeting.” In Interview 10 Alemu says: “I am really, in a way, grateful to God for bringing the Derg to power...it helped the church to really devise strategies of working to help the members keep together.” Commenting on the expectation for MKC members to read the Bible, he adds “we tried to keep track who was behind, lagging behind or who had stopped. And so people really read voraciously, avidly: the Bible, over and over again. And that helped people to be knowledgeable of the Word of God...”

Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 232-233, describes similar patterns of accountability and support for ministry assignments at the national church level as the Evangelism Committee was being established. The team wanted to make sure that nine key ministries were being implemented in each local church; each Committee member “began to report their progress and confer with the rest of the un-imprisoned church leaders.”

sick, experiencing financial problems or struggling spiritually. Semer recalls that if they were “weakening in their spiritual life, we would go and encourage them to really stand with the Lord.”¹⁹⁹ Louam describes a time when his own courage faltered and Kedir brought him needed correction and encouragement:

I was so overwhelmed with the pressure from the government, from the politicians, from the cadres. I said, "Oh, this is too much. I can't serve very well in this situation." I stopped going to the pastoral care meeting we had every Thursday, and...just a few days later, Pastor Kedir came to my house, and he said, "Why did you stop coming to the pastoral care meeting?" I told him, "Well, it's too much of a burden serving God, so I stopped." Pastor Kedir said, "If you stop serving the Lord, Satan will force you to serve him until it comes out through your nose." He'll make you suffer even more. So I thought about it after he went. I thought about it. He's right, you know. I really should serve the Lord, whatever the circumstances. So the next week I went to the meeting.

Kedir greeted him: “Louam! Oh, it's good for you to come back. We'll serve. We'll bear the cross of Christ together. We'll go through the suffering helping each other.”²⁰⁰

iii. Feedback and correction

Research participants describe a number of incidents in which they or others gave or received honest feedback intended to help leaders become more effective in their work. Louam credits senior leaders for being “very careful in how they handled us,” explaining that: “There was a lot of trust and friendship, love amongst us leaders. When we served, there was no suspecting one another. We all worked together in love and in humility. When our senior leaders would rebuke us or tell us when we went wrong...we listened to them.”

Correction, then, was exercised in a context of deep trust. It could, however, take courage to confront a respected leader. Bekele describes valued leaders who “sacrificed themselves for the church” but “became very dictatorial.” It did not continue long, though, because “the top leadership, when they saw that

¹⁹⁹ Interview 15; In Interview 12 Nyala identifies Kedir’s passion for accountability on leadership teams: “Kedir wanted...to keep the body of Christ strong...he always was very active in follow-up work, that people did not slacken in their activities, those that were carrying out the responsibilities under him...did it faithfully to the glory of God.” Semer recalls leaders like Kedir working with ministry teams to give assignments, checking to see whether particular team members “would go to so-and-so's house. How many can they do in a month? Can they visit two people, three people, four people?” Communication within the team was essential to ensure believers’ needs were not neglected. He explains:

We visited people in their homes, tried to counsel them on their Christian living, how to read the Bible, how to pray and attend prayer meetings or Bible study meetings...and also if they had physical needs, if they really lacked food or whatever we would try to provide for their needs. And also we would ask the evangelists to follow-up on the condition of believers who had problems. We tried to really find and...help those in need.

²⁰⁰ Interview 9; in Interview 5 Kifle remembers the powerful impact of Kedir’s encouragement on an occasion when he held Kifle’s hand and said, “Be strong. Be courageous. There are problems, challenges ahead of us, but you stand firm and the Lord will strengthen you.” Kifle says that, “at that time, when he held my hand, and said these words of encouragement, my heart was really filled with joy. I had been really overwhelmed, and my spirits were really uplifted.” He adds that Kedir “encouraged many, many leaders.”

kind of issue ... began to deal with these individuals.” To address domineering leaders, those in responsible positions of leadership would meet with them, sometimes for a week: “They would have prayer and fasting ... They counselled them...and gradually they moved them from that position to another position.” Bekele adds that the church’s chief leaders “were really wise.” Those receiving correction, of course, required external openness; their responses are explored further below.²⁰¹

d. Managing differences among leaders to produce growth

With diverse ethnic, religious, social, economic, regional and educational backgrounds and personalities, MKC leaders naturally brought different perspectives to the challenges they faced under persecution. Some drew professional salaries at their workplace and served the church in their “spare” time; evangelists worked for the church full-time and received varying degrees of financial support. Some leaders identified with the influence of the Mennonite Mission; others with the Pentecostal movement.²⁰² One tense incident occurred about eight months after the church was closed. Evangelist Getaneh arranged for the baptism of new believers at a large home in Addis Ababa. Sources differ on whether it was planned for fifteen or forty candidates. Berihun says that church elders “gave the three evangelists strict direction,” adding, “We wanted only those who were going to be baptized. We didn’t want anyone to accompany any one of them. In the morning, by the time we arrived...there were 85 people. We were shocked and we thought now we were going to be arrested.” When the elders expressed their concern about the risky scenario, Getaneh replied, “The people are not afraid; so don’t you scare them.” Hege explains:

The baptisms began in the bathtub. Halfway through, they drained the tub to start again with clean water. Then they discovered that the water would not flow. Volunteers went to nearby homes with pails to fetch more water. Neighbors, thinking there must be a fire, knocked on the door to offer their help. By this time, the homeowner, already embarrassed by hosting such a larger group, was sweating profusely as he tried to give the neighbors excuses for the unusual activity.

Berihun remembers his anger at the evangelists and his fear that the authorities “might come and take all of us.” The baptism – and then the Lord’s Supper – took hours, but “God helped us to escape this situation.” As they debriefed later, the Addis Ababa MKC leaders agreed that no more than seven unrelated people should meet in a home at one time – and no more than one church leader should be among them.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Interviews 9 and 22; See also Section D.4., “Willingness to receive feedback and correction.”

²⁰² Interview 16.

²⁰³ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 204-205; Interview 3; Recalling this baptism incident in Interview 19 Tengene marvels, “the Lord miraculously covered us and saved us.”

Bekele asserts that in the revolutionary years, church leaders did not have the luxury of fighting among themselves; unity was a necessity: “During the persecution time, you don't think about internal conflict at all. There is no time. If you opened a door [for division]...you would lose the whole thing.”

Indeed, interviewees testify to a deep unity among MKC leaders amid their differences. Selassie says:

In those days people were really, really dedicated. The unity was tremendous. People supported each other. People knew how to relate to each other, pray for each other. You might say we were in a worship mode and cared for each other – even when there were differences. You know, it wasn't personal. Yeah, you would explain your position. Others would try to see it. And if any disagreement came up...we just apologized in tears. And I remember, even in the general assembly, which was a huge one, things were discussed openly. The team spirit was very high.²⁰⁴

Describing the situation in Addis Ababa after the closure of the church, Lema highlights the support that he and other evangelists received from church elders, whose employment limited the time they had available for ministry:

[They] were not involved like us, but...were watching us, what is going on...they showed us love and kindness. That also encouraged us...They didn't know when they were going to jail. Some of their friends were jailed...but from a near distance they were watching us. "How are you guys? How are things going?" They were asking such...questions...That gave spiritual support. That was good for us.²⁰⁵

Dawit celebrates the diverse gifts among MKC leaders that were used effectively because “we respected each other, we heard each other and then we submitted to each other.” He uses a musical analogy to describe how leaders worked well together: “God helped us. He tuned us together, like a guitar that has

²⁰⁴ Interviews 2 and 22; in Interview 21, Teku says:

We respected the church leaders and full-time ministers. We considered them as persons elected and anointed by God, so whatever they said or whatever they taught, we completely accepted and obeyed, to the grassroots level...Though there were some discrepancies, there were some weaknesses, they were obeyed. So...working as a team...I liked it very much, though there were some full-time ministers who were disagreeing, as far as some type of leadership is concerned...teamwork was highly encouraged and accepted.

In Interview 17 Melaku says: “As leaders, as evangelists and people who did other things as leaders, there was much cooperation. We cooperated very well with each other. We loved each other.” In Interview 3, Berihun describes the unity among leaders as a gift of God: “Those of us who survived the arrests bonded together for the common cause of Christ...Each one of us were committed to his call and committed to one another...Each member of the committee had one spirit and mind. Amazingly, we had unity in everything we think and do. This is the gift which comes from God himself, really. Each of us was ready to anything, any time for the glory of God.”

Describing MKC leadership team dynamics in Interview 16, Hakim says: “It was fantastic. We had developed harmony...There was love...complete unity. The persecutors were amazed.”

²⁰⁵ Interview 17; In the same interview, Melaku also describes the kindness of other MKC leaders:

We weren't paid workers, but from time to time, the leaders would encourage us by giving us clothing, by giving us notebooks that we could use for our work. Pastor Kadir came all the way from Nazareth to bring us together and give us words of counsel. I appreciate the dedication they had, and the love and the encouragement they showed us.

different strings. To harmonize, God just tuned us a good way to get harmony...Like strings on the guitar, the one is very thin, the other is bold...The sound is different but when you play they give good sound.”²⁰⁶

Solomon compares himself with other leaders to illustrate how the church needs people with varied personalities and gifts in leadership. He notes how he and Kedir “complemented one another.” Whereas Kedir was experienced as “powerful,” “blunt,” “aggressive” and “straightforward,” unafraid to rebuke anyone who needed correction, Solomon took a softer approach toward others, in order “to win their hearts.” Given complaints that he heard about Kedir, Solomon expected his brother would not be re-elected at a particular general council meeting: “But they chose him. And I asked them, ‘You came and complained, but you again chose him.’ ‘You know,’ they said. ‘As long as you are in the leadership, we want him in the leadership because he balances your softness at times and...you heal the wounded. So as long as you are there, we want him. As long as he is there, you have to be there.’” Solomon describes an occasion at a Key Leader Training event in which he was trying to convince the group of certain points, “but they were not willing to act accordingly.” When it was Kedir’s turn to teach, the group wanted to revisit an issue that Solomon had raised. Kedir simply said, “If you get in line, get in line. Otherwise, get away from here.” Laughing, Solomon observes, “That was his whole message! And they got in line. So it was peaceful. It continued well. And I said, ‘So I need Kedir. I need Kedir.’”²⁰⁷

e. Shared recreation

Abebech and Jazarah remember joyful fellowship and recreation shared by Nazareth MKC leaders at the nearby Sodere hot springs resort. Every year, a couple of hundred men and women from the local

²⁰⁶ Interview 1; in Interview 10 Alemu describes the encouragement that came with of having “different gifts of the Spirit among us” to “serve one another,” adding, “I wasn’t alone and I didn’t have all the gifts. We worked together encouraging each other.”

²⁰⁷ Interview 18; Offering another example of the need for diverse perspectives and gifts in leadership, Solomon describes Siyum’s readiness to make sacrifices for the kingdom of God. When considering a potential ministry assignment, Solomon weighs it strategically: “The way I think: ‘How much is this worth for the Lord? Is it worth a hundred dollars or one million dollars?’ I said. So if it is going towards big, I give myself. But Siyum, if he thinks it is worth one cent for the Lord, he will walk the whole night...He is committed. He doesn’t count his cost, his energy, whether he eats or not. He works until he is exhausted.” Solomon remembers Siyum, as an elementary school teacher in Gojam, walking twenty-five miles to Bahir Dar every Friday to serve an evangelical fellowship there, returning Sunday afternoon. Highlighting Siyum’s dedication, Solomon laughs, saying, “I wouldn’t do that: 25 miles.” Comparing himself to Alemu (present for the interview) Solomon highlights his friend’s availability: “If anybody pulls [him], ‘Let’s do this,’ he goes with that. He doesn’t say no...He was always available. And for me personally, it was him, only him, with whom I used to share. I had to speak almost every week. Every time when I prepared something, I came and shared with him. And if he raised questions, I went back and reviewed it.” Similarly, in Interview 16, Hakim lifts up the self-denial of many evangelists, who in obedience to their reading of Scripture said, “I don’t need to be hired. I just go and preach.” In contrast to those who left government jobs to work for the church, Hakim says, “I don’t understand that, you know. I like to have a secure job and serve. But there were a few who said no.”

church leadership travelled on hired buses to a government-owned spa near the Awash River to swim in an Olympic sized swimming pool, bathe in the hot springs, eat, sing, take pictures and pray together.

Unhindered by the authorities, leaders who would normally have to avoid greeting each other on a city street could enjoy each other's company. For a day, they could almost forget they were leaders of a persecuted church living under a repressive regime. Jazarah notes that it "was one strategy to keep the body of Christ together and enjoy life as well." Likewise, Abebech observes that it was a way of experiencing "our unity, our belongingness."²⁰⁸

3. Relationships in the church

Interviewees insist that love for the church is essential for Christian leadership. For Kifle, leaders need to be "really concerned about the...body of believers." Without "love and compassion, it's hard to really persevere and even sacrifice." Likewise, Semer says, "Love...is the best quality that is needed. A leader who loves believers when they come to him would try to meet their needs in love...Even though they may have done something wrong, when they come to confess their failures, he should accept them and show them love. That was what our leaders did in those difficult years."²⁰⁹

Kelile describes some early effects of persecution on relationships in the church:

Up until the socialist revolution, as a church we were very, very close. We worked together and we had fellowship. It was really warm and kind of lovely, but when the socialist revolution came, it took away much of this closeness and friendship and working together as a congregation. We had to be very, very careful in how we met and how we worshipped. It took away that warmth for a while, because we couldn't meet as we did before. We couldn't sing as we did before. We couldn't work together and do things as we used to. We had to change our way of doing things.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Interviews 10 and 14; Jazarah remembers that "all of us believers went together" to Sodere. Abebech identifies it as an activity of the Nazareth leaders' group.

²⁰⁹ Interviews 5 and 15; in Interview 8 Teru notes that to pursue love requires leaders to rely on God and seek his glory rather than their own: "This kind of leader will have the love for his flock, for his followers. He will have a burden to lead them in the right way and to share whatever needs they have: spiritual, physical and so on." In Interview 13 Zere connects the humility of MKC leaders he admires who "lived out their lives for Christ" with their love for "their flock, the members."

²¹⁰ Interview 4; Like fellow church members MKC leaders craved interaction with other believers. Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 40, notes that when believers could no longer meet freely after the closure of the church, "They didn't know whom to trust. Doubts and fears were rampant," but with the creation of the underground cell structure, "people regained trust and started to gather." Interviews 1, 2, 9, 22 and Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 38-40, 49, also identifies the challenge of knowing whom could be trusted amid the initial tumult of the revolution and when the church was closed. Home fellowships became important settings for Christian community. In Interviews 9 Louam remembers a wonderful mutual acceptance among believers as he visited different cell groups. People were not only "really hungry for the Word of God," they "wanted to see people, Christian faces." Alemu Checole, "Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa," 234, notes that monthly worship services which gathered believers from different cell groups provided another venue for those who "longed to see the faces of their brothers and sisters."

Motivated by their love for Jesus Christ and his people, MKC leaders pursued various strategies for strengthening the church, as seen above. In addition to teaching, discipleship ministries, visitation, creating cell groups, calling and equipping new leaders, leaders expressed love through a) advocacy for believers facing injustice, b) protecting others when possible, c) empathetic and wise pastoral care, d) material assistance, e) support for prisoners and their families, f) conflict management and mediation, and g) music ministry for believers.

a. Advocacy

Church leaders became advocates for evangelical believers who had few legal options when suffering injustice. Nyala remembers Kedir as “a man of justice” who “always spoke out when people were unjustly treated.” He accompanied believers to court and ensured they had good legal advice. When five MKC members in Dire Dawa were arrested for their evangelistic witness to fellow police officers and soldiers, church elders tried to negotiate for their release.²¹¹ When kebele officials arrested Nazareth Bible Academy students, teachers lobbied other Derg officials for three days until they ruled the students’ imprisonment an error. When Nazareth MKC members were jailed and beaten in 1977, church leaders appealed to town officials and wrote letters to twenty different kebeles, seeking their freedom. Finally, a delegation of five met with the governor of Nazareth. “What is the problem?” they asked. “What have we done to hurt our country? Is there any evidence [against us]?” After a lengthy conversation, the governor promised to try to end the harassment. Alemu, a delegation member, notes that the willingness of leaders to take such risks – and the favourable result – “helped people to have more courage, more faith.”²¹²

b. Protecting others

When possible, church leaders tried to protect others from persecution. Elaborating on the need to train leaders well and ensure that believers did not expose themselves to unnecessary risk, Lema says,

²¹¹ Interview 12; Girma Haile, “Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church,” 14. The police officers remained imprisoned for almost a year, however, because they refused to accept the demands of government leaders that they not “witness about Jesus to others.”

²¹² Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 172-174; Interviews 4, 10, 13 and 14; In Interview 4, Kelile remembers 1977 and 1978 as difficult years in which MKC members were beaten and imprisoned. He and other leaders met often during that time, and despite the personal risk involved, “decided to go and appeal to the political bureau, to the administrators, and say, ‘Why are you...persecuting our members for their faith? They haven't done anything wrong.’” As a member of the delegation to the Nazareth governor, Kelile says, “We talked to him and God was with us, so he gave us grace before him and favour. He said, ‘We will take the necessary measures to make the cadres stop their aggressive activities,’ and so God helped us with that...”

“When I ask for this house for the Bible study, I am supposed to care for the house, for the house family and for the people who come from the outside, what is done in this house. You have so many responsibilities.”

Dawit describes the challenge of finding a safe home for a high school student whose father decided to kill her because she converted to Christianity. After receiving Jesus Christ as her Saviour, “she tried to hide for a period of time,” but her family discovered her whereabouts. “As a church leader, what can I do?” Dawit asked himself. To reduce the danger for her, he found an MKC family in another town who was willing to take her in.²¹³

On other occasions, MKC leaders tried to prevent the arrest of co-leaders. When Derg officials arrived at Nazareth Bible Academy to arrest director Negash Kebede, academic dean Bedru Hussein managed to warn him and distract the officers, allowing him to escape.²¹⁴ While former MKC chairperson Shamsudin Abdo was under interrogation during his 1982 arrest, he noticed a list of seventeen MKC members who were to be arrested. He assured the officer in charge that he would answer all questions about the church and if he lacked any necessary knowledge, he would call someone who had it. “You don’t need anyone else,” he said. The official replied, “We work under government authority. They tell us what to do, and we don’t take orders from you.” Shamsudin answered, “I made a suggestion; I did not give you an order. If my suggestion doesn’t work, use the method you wish, but you will find all the answers you want from me.” The officer stroked off sixteen names from the list; only one remained for arrest.²¹⁵

c. Empathetic and wise pastoral care

Leaders demonstrated empathetic and wise pastoral care toward church members in a variety of ways: including through i) ministries of presence in times of celebration, hardship and grief, ii) words of encouragement and prayer, iii) listening and wise guidance, and iv) letter-writing.

i. Ministries of presence

MKC leaders highly value a ministry of presence, reflected in their priority on visitation and group gatherings. Noting that “loneliness is a hidden killer,” Teku stresses the need for persecuted believers to

²¹³ Interviews 1 and 17.

²¹⁴ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 25-26; Interviews 16 and 21; Ten days later, after conferring with other MKC leaders, Negash presented himself to Addis Ababa authorities; he was arrested and spent four and a half years in prison.

²¹⁵ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 24-25.

remain connected with each other. Describing why “visiting is essential in leadership,” Berihun explains that when a leader meets members in their own context – whether at home or at work – he or she is able to “share their concern,” and respond by giving counsel, prayer support and encouragement to pray. In these moments “the Word of God becomes alive” and people “open their heart.” Leaders demonstrated love by spending time with others, especially those who were sick or struggling in some way. With appreciation, Berihun remembers leaders who “laboured day and night,” whose “house was always open for the people who wanted to see them for counselling and support.” Empathy for others, sharing in their joy and sadness, was essential in this ministry of presence. As a deacon and member of the pastoral care committee, Abebech and her ministry team made home visits to celebrate a baby’s birth, taking gifts, sharing from the Word of God and eating together. They also visited bereaved families and shared in their grief. Nyala remembers how Kedir “cried with Christians who were suffering; he wept with them.”²¹⁶

ii. Words of encouragement and prayer

Research participants identify the importance of mutual encouragement and praying for each other. Dawit remembers receiving strength from God’s Word, the Holy Spirit and others who were surrounding him. Another leader might come and say, “I dreamed something about you” or “I don’t know in what situation you are. We are just praying for you.” He says, “It encourages me...Wow. So, God, you are with me.” Leaders not only prayed for those close to them, but even for some they did not personally know. Testifying that “God is a great God,” Dawit tells of a believer who asked for a room in a church building where he could fast and pray for five days. Dawit gave him a room with a key. For the first three days, the man prayed and wept for an MKC leader whom he did not know. On the evening of the third day, he told Dawit that he wanted to quit his fasting and prayer. When Dawit asked why, the man gave him the name of the leader for whom he was praying. Dawit said, “Go ahead. It is the work of God. Do finish.” For five days his guest “prayed for that guy whom he did not know.” Dawit, however, knew the leader well; he was serving in an MKC congregation far from that community. Believing that the Holy Spirit had brought the leader’s name to his guest, Dawit recorded the date. Later he learned that the man “was in great trouble.” His wife was backsliding in her faith and had turned against him. As a driver for upper-level communist

²¹⁶ Interviews 3, 10, 12, 15, 18, 19 and 21; In Interview 22 Bekele describes the effort that he and more senior leaders put into tracking down believers whom they had not seen for a while, then sitting and having tea together. He also notes that families would visit each other.

leaders, he was on a long trip during the five days of prayer and fasting. Bombarded with communist songs, shouting and people who “just wanted to disturb him,” the church leader had “no time to pray” or “have fellowship with God” during that time. Dawit observes that his co-leader “was in great trouble, but God used that fellow” to pray and fast for him. “This is how God worked in our country. God was with his people, encouraging and empowering them. And we were always with hope.”²¹⁷

iii. Listening and wise guidance

Highlighting the need for leaders to show love, patience and compassion to others, Alemu observes that “when people know that you are really caring for them, that you want to help them, they come to you for counsel.” He notes that an essential dimension of this care is a readiness to listen to those who are hurting. Teku likewise insists that for those suffering persecution, “One of the best things is to listen: to approach them and listen to what they are thinking, what their inner drive looks like. Have they been offended or are they being encouraged? Are they nominal [Christians] or are they leading the real life? To approach them and to understand in what condition they are, and give them feedback by counselling... this is very, very excellent.” He maintains that when leaders listen to those “suffering from different types of problems related to persecution,” they help them “to stay together” with the church. If leaders do not take time to listen, however, believers may easily become discouraged and, offended, “flee away from the church.”²¹⁸

Leaders tried to encourage and exhort “those who were frightened and disheartened by communist propaganda and threat.” Jazarah says, “We showed them from the Word of God what they should do, what not to do.”²¹⁹ Lema recalls that when visiting people, they would discuss problems they were facing and counsel them. Recalling the close relationships among believers, he says,

We remembered each other. Sometimes we didn’t know how God gave us some words. When I came to you, God sent me with a word of courage. When I delivered that word to you, your spirit revived. “O God came with his Word and encouraged my spiritual life. I stand firm.” The faith community was having challenges in their offices. They forced them to attend the communist

²¹⁷ Interviews 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19 and 21; Louam notes that when visiting believers, leaders “would pray for them and pray with them.” Jazarah likewise mentions that praying with others and for them in elders’ council meetings were ways that leaders tried to help them cope with the challenges they faced.

²¹⁸ Interviews 10 and 21.

²¹⁹ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 76-77; Interviews 5 and 14; Shortly after the closure of MKC in 1982, Kifle spent a period of time moving from house to house in one remote area “trying to encourage...and comfort” believers before he was arrested. After his release, he remained in the region for about a month, visiting believers’ homes, tell them, “Take heart. The devil is just trying to weaken you, trying to create fear, but the Lord who is with you is greater, stronger than your enemy the devil.”

teaching. Some of them were not willing, but they...forced them to do that which is contrary to their faith. Some of them cried. Some of them faced problems, but we encouraged them: "Keep on. Keep on. God is at work. Keep on."²²⁰

According to Louam, church members respected leaders and "listened to whatever counsel we gave them." Those whose faith was waning were less receptive to guidance from MKC leaders. Teru notes that "so-called Christians" who "were really weak" and "had committed sins of different types" were "against leaders who rebuked them or who tried to help them to come back." Jazarah appreciates the wisdom, understanding, care and love of MKC leaders, who kept members up-to-date with reports about church challenges and the political context. Berihun says that to help others cope with the pressures of persecution leaders "gave them guidelines, to do things wisely and cautiously." If they had problems or questions, they were encouraged to contact him or another MKC leader.²²¹

iv. Letter-writing

The Nazareth Meserete Kristos Church developed a letter-writing program to "uplift and encourage" members who were living in other parts of Ethiopia or were outside the country, including those who "had left the faith." Abera Ertiro writes that mature believers and part-time ministers were assigned one or more people with whom to stay in touch, offering biblically-based encouragement and guidance and responding to letters from recipients.²²²

d. Material assistance

In a context of widespread poverty – compounded by persecution – MKC leaders mobilized the resources of the church to meet the needs of believers in financial difficulty, trying to ensure that impoverished members retained their dignity in the process. Abebech recalls that some cell group members

²²⁰ Interview 17; Lema also remembers believers encouraging each other by asking, "How are things going today? How are you, brother?"

²²¹ Interviews 3, 8, 9 and 14; in Interview 12 Nyala highlights the responsiveness of believers to Kedir's counsel: "People would come with different problems and he would counsel them. He would make them realize where they had gone wrong and they would repent and go home rejoicing. Or they would come very much frightened by what was happening to them in the kebele or different places. He would strengthen them with the Word of God and pray with them and they would go home rejoicing."

²²² Abera Ertiro, "Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth," 40. Reflecting on her letter-writing ministry in Interview 8, Teru says that she wrote Bible-based messages of comfort and encouragement for recipients to "stand firm in their faith." In one case, a young man assigned by the Derg to work in a distant community was devastated when his evangelical Christian fiancée broke their engagement. He was ready to abandon his faith. Teru wrote to him, quoting from Deuteronomy 32:50: "You die on the mountain you have climbed." Based on her message, "he repented and said, 'Lord, forgive me for my denial of you ... my disrespect.' And so he confessed and wrote a letter to the church, saying, 'Teru's letter brought me back from the cliff.'"

could not afford to bring food to share at meetings. Others would prepare food for two, three or four others, who were told “not to feel embarrassed” for not contributing. House fellowships hosted wedding ceremonies and provided food for couples unable to cover the cost of their celebration. Some believers needed help with transportation. Others, who were rejected by their families because of their faith in Jesus, needed a home. Abebech describes a group of compassionate women who helped orphans, widows and others in poverty by sharing flour, sauce-making products like shiro, and spices with them. Young people would help repair “old, dilapidated houses,” a practice that continues. She observes that under persecution church members began to offer more practical assistance to each other than previously: “Before the Derg came we just came to church and went away and didn't do anything during the week for anybody. We weren't involved. Now, during the Derg we were helping each other.”²²³

Berihun notes that leaders not only addressed immediate crises through “some material and financial support,” but also wanted to enable members to become self-supporting when possible. One strategy for helping unemployed church members was to provide micro-loans to help them start their own businesses: “We created a revolving fund. Many were able to be benefited from this scheme in the underground.” Financed by member tithes, the fund allowed a potential entrepreneur to buy equipment, such as stoves to bake injera, which they could then sell in the market. The church also provided financial support to students in need. Teku expresses gratitude for MKC leaders who funded his education at

²²³ Interviews 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16 and 21; Jazarah says that leaders would help believers “with their financial problems” if they were facing “a shortage of food, or clothing or whatever.” Abebech remembers visiting a woman whose husband was working out of town, earning the equivalent of only thirty U.S. dollars per month. She says,

I saw her giving the children some roasted grain, just to put in their mouths and drink water and go to school. She had not baked injera for three years because she didn't have the means to buy teff. So I was really sad. I went to the church, told the story and the church gave 300 birr. That was about a hundred U.S. dollars at that time. We bought a bag of teff for her and other things and she really wept. They paid the house rent because she hadn't paid for many, many months. That really was something that made her even more faithful to the Lord and depend on him. We prayed for her and soon after that her husband's salary was raised dramatically. So it was an answer to prayer.

Abebech adds: “Our friendship, our love, our concern to others was much, much better during the Derg years than before. It made us come closer, and concerned for each other.”

In Interview 9 Louam says that as part of a deacon team, “We would go to the houses of poor people and find out what they needed, and supplied those things.” In one case he and a female deacon brought wheat flour and butter to a woman who had recently delivered a baby and whose husband had abandoned her. He also says: “Whenever people who were persecuted and were forced to leave their...residences and came to Nazareth, we would invite them into our houses.” In Interview 12 Teru says that leaders “helped those who were displaced from their place where they lived. We took them into our houses and gave them what they needed, clothed them, fed them. So, people felt like they were being taken care of.” Teru also highlights Kedir's support for the poor and welcome of displaced people into his home.

Nazareth Bible Academy and then for two years of study in Addis Ababa: “Economically my parents were bankrupt. They didn't have sufficient money, but the church supported me.”²²⁴

Burial space for deceased evangelical Christians was another pressing practical need. Prior its closing in 1982, the Wonji MKC operated a cemetery for believers, including those of other denominations, who could not be buried in Orthodox or Catholic cemeteries. Yacob describes the worry that “Your body is not going to have a burial place,” but “will be lying somewhere” after death. Helping people “get honourably buried in our cemetery,” was a concrete way of supporting people amid persecution.²²⁵

e. Support for prisoners and their families

Supporting imprisoned MKC members and their families was a special priority of church leaders, who prayed for prisoners, visited them, and ensured that they received food to supplement inadequate prison rations. They also gave emotional, spiritual and financial support to families who were not only deprived of their loved one's presence, but also income. Dawit describes the challenge of providing materially for families of imprisoned leaders who had had relatively high-paying jobs. Not wanting them to suffer a decrease in their living standard, MKC support for them was supplemented by gifts from the global church. Selassie remembers, with gratitude, how God used the church to carry him and his family while he was in prison. Even people they did not know visited the family, brought gifts for them and prayed for them “all over, not only within Ethiopia, but internationally. That was a big, big, big encouragement.”²²⁶

As a deacon, Abebech visited the families of seven believers who were imprisoned for refusing to say a Marxist slogan. She and others went “to pray with them and to encourage them that Jesus is still on the throne.” Some were frustrated and angry because of the persecution. Abebech and her team told them

²²⁴ Interviews 3 and 21.

²²⁵ Interview 7; in Interview 9 Tengene describes the challenge of finding burial space for a deceased child after a mob in Addis Ababa forced grieving MKC members to disinter a child from a grave beside an Orthodox cemetery. Needing to pay grave-diggers present in the crowd to re-open the grave, Tengene carried the corpse back to the car that had transported it. He says: “We went to the higher kebele authorities and they were unwilling to help us. We had to return the corpse to the church. The next day we took the corpse to a church...[with] a cemetery for every kind of faith.”

²²⁶ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 45, 48, 53 ; Girma Haile, “Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church,” 14; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 22-23, 182; Lehman, “Aster Debossie,” 23; Interviews 1, 2, 7, 9, 14 and 16; Selassie highlights the support MKC women provided to prisoners: “The women would send meals to us...not one person, but as a group...once a week they would send tons of food to all of us.” Hakim describes how his cellmates were also blessed by the generosity of evangelical Christians: “We had much food coming in our name (the Pentes, we are called). So the cell where I was assigned (these were political young people) and I would take like 20 meals. Those people who were there were, most of them for five years, seven years, with nobody to visit them. Our cell prospered as a result of my being there.”

that God would help those in prison, and that, “This is something that is expected to happen to us as Christians. We suffer. We will suffer for the sake of Christ.” She adds, “That’s one way we helped others to cope with the challenges of the time.” She also remembers receiving blessing from those she was trying to encourage: “Sometimes we got very, very satisfying responses from them...it was encouraging to hear that they were really deeply rooted in the Word and dependent on God, on God’s faithfulness and goodness, and so we came back strengthened from some of the testimonies that we heard from them.”²²⁷

f. Conflict management and mediation

Love for the church required leaders both to manage their own conflicts with members well and to mediate conflicts between others. Dawit describes the pain of “persecution” when it comes from inside the church, adding that one cannot simply rebuke the other: “If your brother, whom you think is with you, if he goes back against you and tries to harm you, what do you do?” Teru and Nyala recall Kedir’s ability to handle conflict with patience and grace. Teru remembers Kedir joking that, “It’s the Derg officials and the choir members in the church that really made me bald.” Nyala recounts a testimony about him given by a choir member at a public meeting. The man said:

When we quarrelled with him, when we had a fight, we didn’t understand that he was really trying to put us on the right path. Now I see that it was for our good, for our benefit and growth that he was suffering with us. You know, others are building homes for themselves. They are enhancing their own interests, but Brother Kedir was always working on the lives of the believers, and not working for his house, for his comfort: never.

Leaders also engaged in ministries of reconciliation with others, counselling husbands and wives through marital conflict and helping to make peace between parents and children.²²⁸

g. Music ministry

The Marxist era was a time of exceptional musical creativity in the Meserete Kristos Church. Song-writers in the church enabled believers to give voice to biblical truth in fresh, relevant forms that engaged the heart. Music ministry nurtured church members’ relationship with God and became a vehicle for diverse ministries as leaders took risks to make worship music accessible in challenging circumstances. Choirs functioned openly in the early years of the revolution, but by the late 1970s could not legally include

²²⁷ Interview 10; Abebech adds that she and her team reminded families of imprisoned believers that for Christians “there is trouble in the world, as Jesus said. As you live in this world, there is trouble, but don’t be afraid.”

²²⁸ Interviews 1, 8, 10 and 12. Nyala emphasizes that Kedir’s humility was evident in times of disagreement among church members. He wanted “to keep his tongue from saying anything displeasing to God...”

singers younger than thirty years old. Choir members not only sang, but also took an active role in pastoral care, evangelism and prayer ministry.²²⁹

Abebech explains that during the underground period, the Nazareth choir (known as “Lidet” choir) would divide into three or four groups, each with four to six members who would visit different house fellowships and lead music. To avoid attention from the authorities, on the evening before a meeting they would cover their instrument – a guitar or accordion – with a cloth and take it by horse cart to the host home. Travelling three or four kilometres from home, they would visit four or five houses on foot in a day, leading worship at each one, singing softly to stay out of trouble. A number of cell groups – totalling no more than thirty people – might be gathered in each location. Kelemuw Abebe describes the deep appreciation that many church members had for this ministry: “Some gave thanks to God with their tears, when they saw the cloth and musical instruments of the choir.” Shortly after the fall of the Derg, Tamarat testified that, “God used music in a special way. Several of us were called to this ministry. Believers did not know each other outside their cell groups,” but “Music helped bring us together.”²³⁰

In Addis Ababa, music director Bekele was discouraged by the dispersal of his choir after the church closed, especially when he learned that some members were weakening in their Christian faith, even joining the communist party. He and a few committed choir members wanted to regather the choir, but leaders of the congregation thought it would be too risky. Bekele and his friends insisted: “We have to pay a price for our brothers and sisters. Yes, we know that if the communists find out all this, something may happen to us or to the church, but let's pay a price for our brothers and sisters. If we need to die, let's die - but we need to get them back.”

With the approval of congregational leaders, Bekele and his small team contacted all the choir members confidentially and met at a Qale Heywet church building in the city. He describes the impact of

²²⁹ Abera Ertiro, “Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth,” 49-50; Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 231, notes that the Jimma, Nazareth and Addis Ababa MKC choirs were well-known among Christians of southern Ethiopia. A number of solo singers “attained great popularity and their singing is still held in high regard among evangelical Christians.” In Interview 22 Bekele mentions the difficulty of singing Amharic songs using four-part Western harmonies introduced by missionaries. In the early years of the Derg, he began composing Amharic songs using indigenous rhythms and original melodies. He believes he was the first MKC member to do so. He explains that “just when we were close to the persecution, God gave us different songs,” which enabled people “to pass through all these situations.” He adds, “Those songs were really written from the Scripture, but practical for the time we had...we used to get inspiration.”

²³⁰ Interview 10; Abera Ertiro, “Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth,” 49-50; Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; in Interview 17 Lema and Melaku describe the encouragement they received from songs composed during the persecution period, and with Alemu sing a song “about paying the great sacrifice for my Christian life, for my Christianity. It is the life like the apostles and like the prophets; they suffered...I'll have to sacrifice like them...”

the choir's reunion on the lives of its members. Many had felt isolated in communities with no other evangelical Christians and shed tears of joy to be reunited with the choir. Some who had been regressing in their faith asked why they were invited to return. "We are not as we used to be," they said. Bekele and his team responded, "No, we still believe you are our brothers and sisters." The choir continued to meet and sing for the remaining seven years of the Derg regime. Bekele helped each member connect with an evangelical church, unconcerned whether it was MKC, Mulu Wengel, Mekane Yesus or Qale Heywet. When the government of Mengistu Haile Mariam fell, the choir sang at MKC's first public worship service. Bekele says, "I think the important thing was not really that they sang the song," but that "we found them life." With joy, he says, "In all those years, they were kept safe in the church and finally they came out from the persecution together, with the church."²³¹

Zere gives thanks for the gift of worship music amid persecution. In particular, he remembers a monthly gathering in 1983 at the home of Tadesse and Feluku in Nazareth. A group of five choir members led worship, followed by a guest solo singer from Addis Ababa. As he stood, singing with his guitar, Zere recalls that "we were really touched, really inspired." Although cramped together in a tiny room and perspiring "profusely," he says, "Our hearts were filled with joy. The message from the song was so powerful. We were also crying. Our tears streamed down our cheeks... We weren't frightened by anything. The joy of the Lord just filled us."²³²

4. Relationships beyond the church

MKC leaders' conviction that the love of God extended to their non-believing neighbours motivated their passion for evangelism and led them to seek the well-being of their communities and nation. Berihun's comments on his prayer ministry reflect an expansive field of concern: "As a Christian, I am responsible for governments, for communities, the whole country, even for the whole world. I am responsible and God has given us power. What kind of power? ...God gave his Son so that we might be heirs through his Son. So we have access to his whole majesty in prayer."

²³¹ Interview 22; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 232, reports that a choir of twenty-five members in Dire Dawa survived the Derg years by meeting for practice at a Catholic church and then singing in homes and at funerals. Choir leader Johni Teklu says, "We were considered 'harmless children.'"

²³² Interview 13; in Interview 9 Louam recalls an MKC funeral ceremony with preaching and strong singing. A Derg party member who was also a member of the Qale Heywet Church said, "I really wonder. They study the Bible secretly, but where do they learn the singing? Where do they practice it?"

Explaining evangelical believers' desire to lead others to Christ, Lema says, "Our joy is that: how God loved these people." Berihun describes the love for "lost ones" which the Holy Spirit gave to him, adding that God "is waiting for people to repent," and "doesn't want anyone to be lost." Research participants demonstrated love for those outside the church in a variety of ways. In addition to supporting believers, Selassie says, "we made sure that we also helped the community. Financially and materially we helped the poor..." Leaders visited the sick in their community, prayed for them, offered emotional support and shared their faith. Imprisoned MKC leaders shared their food with fellow inmates and assisted them in other practical ways. Alemu notes that MKC members took part in community events and projects "as long as it wasn't compromising our faith. We tried to participate in weddings, funerals, whatever they had – and in giving. The kebele would ask us to contribute towards some cause. We did that as much as we could and I think that sort of showed them that we were not anti-social, not against the society as such."²³³

Yacob describes his desire "to treat everybody equally, without partiality" as an elementary school principal. He recalls a mother who wanted to register her son for grade 8 at the school" but "there was no space for another child." He told the woman, "We don't really have space now. It's full, but you can bring him to the evening school...if anyone of those that are registered for the day school leave or if they don't come, then he can be transferred to the day section." When she went to another government school, the director spoke rudely to her. She told a teacher's at Yacob's school, "Your director is not really a human being. He is an angel." Yacob says, "I treated her respectfully and lovingly because I fear God, not because I want the honour and the glory and the name. But I tried to treat everybody equally."²³⁴

Abebech describes her effort to maintain friendship with former believers who lost their faith when the church was closed:

During those years, they would come occasionally to see us, in our house. They were so close; they were our friends. They would come to visit, and I always treated them well, in friendship. I invited them for lunch or to tea...Finally, I told them, "This is not really the way you should go. You have tasted of the goodness of the Lord. You should come back to him." Two of them came back after three years. The other one came after five years.

²³³ Interviews 2, 3, 10, 14 and 17; Girma Haile, "Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church," 28, highlights the Holy Spirit's role in changing believers so that "their lifestyle itself was witnessing about Jesus and showing the love of God." Jazarah describes regular visits to a non-believing family, praying for their daughter who had a heart problem, and healing that resulted when she invited an evangelist to come to the home to pray for the young woman. In Hostetler, *Against Great Odds* and Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 182-183, Shamsudin Abdo says that air quality in his prison cell was so poor that the group took turns lifting an asthmatic prisoner so his face could rest near the bars above the door, the only source of ventilation in the room.

²³⁴ Interview 7.

Abebech admits that the presence of these friends in her house sometimes caused others discomfort, especially when the pastoral committee met there for their weekly meeting. She remembers: “Some of the pastoral committee members didn’t like when they saw these girls in our house because they were afraid that they might spy on them...I said, ‘Well, they are people who understand the Christian life and it’s because they are weak [that they drifted away]...but the Lord will help them to come back, so I shouldn’t send them away.’” The young women were sometimes deliberately disruptive, “calling the names of the pastoral committee members,” as they entered her house. Abebech admits: “I was kind of split. I was sort of sandwiched: torn between those girls’ needs – physical and spiritual needs – and the pastoral meeting. That was a challenge to me.” Even so, she persisted with her leadership tasks as well as her commitment to treat the young women “in a friendly way.”²³⁵

5. Love for persecutors

Relationships between MKC leaders and their persecutors could be complex. Despite the risks involved, many believers boldly gave testimony about their faith in Jesus Christ to authorities or others with power to harm them. They sometimes confronted officials about the unjust treatment of Christians. In some situations they complied with orders to limit ministry activities and in others, verbally challenged or quietly defied them. Church leaders were committed to loving their persecutors despite the difficulties of doing so. Although evangelical Christians were denounced as “stupid and wicked,” Gemechu writes, “Whatever evil words they say we must love them. The best way to love our enemies is to continue to be salt, a purifying and enhancing element, and we are to not hide our light but place it even higher ‘on a hill.’ Through Christ we are the eternal victors. To love our neighbor, whether hostile or not, we must continually find ways to demonstrate Christ in their presence.”²³⁶

The source material reflects various dimensions of this challenge, including a) the process of learning to love persecutors, b) seeing persecution in the context of spiritual warfare, c) prayer for persecutors, d) empathy toward persecutors, e) treating persecutors fairly and kindly, and f) the conversion of persecutors in response to loving Christian witness.

²³⁵ Interview 10.

²³⁶ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 89.

a. Learning to love persecutors

Tengene considers how God can use persecution to expand believers' capacity to love as part of a purifying, testing and refining process: "God brings times of trial to test us and to purify us. We learn patience through suffering. We learn love, true love, during times of persecution. We learn humility when we have arrogant, proud people over us, towering over us."²³⁷

A number of MKC leaders acknowledge the challenge of overcoming their anger toward persecutors in order to love them. Bekele admits that "at the moment" he was threatened, it could be "really difficult" to keep his heart open to his persecutors. Kelile says that "Observing all the injustice...the suffering that people were going through, the killing and the beating...sometimes really made me so angry inside." Gebresalassie confesses: "I was angry with the government, of course. They took our church buildings and used them for other purposes. In fact, at one point I wished the Lord would curse the earth and make the earth open up and swallow the church building."²³⁸

Although research participants largely emphasize the power of God to enable love for persecutors, two describe incidents in which leaders directed their anger against those opposing them. Louam recalls a political meeting at which a young MKC leader was called "worthless" by a cadre, and responded with an insult: "Jesus has many children who are very valuable, but you are worthless." Tewodros admits that when he was denied a graduation certificate after successfully completing a workplace education programme, he tried to intimidate the man responsible by threatening to harm his children.²³⁹

²³⁷ Interview 19.

²³⁸ Interviews 4 and 22, Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*. Interviews 6, 9, 10, 12 and 21 also report anger in response to persecution. Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 25-28, describes Tasisa Esthetu's reaction to a zemecha camp crowd who threatened him and another evangelical Christian, seized and began to rip and burn their Bibles and other Christian literature. Tasisa ran, grabbed the Bibles in "great anger," and demanded that the group remember why they had come, asking if they intended to destroy all religion from Ethiopia and how they had become ensnared in this "hidden agenda." He insisted that the materials "were the Christians' property and the others had no right to tear and burn them."

²³⁹ Interviews 6 and 9. As a factory supervisor Tewodros refused to join the Derg political party because of his Christian faith. Even so, he was invited to take part in a year-and-a-half long management course. When it was time to graduate, however, he says, "They didn't want to give me the certificate right away, even though I had passed successfully all the courses, but they held [on] to my results. They said, 'We want to see you and we want to test and find out how well you can perform in this new position, even though you have received the training...' "I had actually done [this work]...for fifteen years or so, but they just wanted to cause problems because I was a Christian."

Tewodros admits to threatening the person responsible for withholding his graduation certificate, saying, "I have a machete. You have two children. I have two children. You be careful, otherwise I might be tempted to take strong measures against you." When the operations manager learned about the conflict, he sided with Tewodros, and arranged for a ceremony in his own home at which he presented graduate certificate to Tewodros and another Christian who had experienced similar discrimination.

In the early stages of persecution, Gemechu remembers that his anger blocked his ability to love his persecutors: “My prayer was full of hatred and full of cursing. I prayed for a long time for the destruction of those who were persecuting us.” His perspective was transformed, he says, when,

One midnight God woke me in my bed and made me to kneel down and pray. The power of the Holy Spirit changed the direction of my prayer. My hatred changed into love, my curse was changed into blessing, I began calling the names of those who were persecuting us, and suddenly began blessing them ... from that day onward my direction of praying was completely changed. The Holy Spirit brought to my memory...Romans 12:14: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them." The change that I experienced that night brought a change in my attitude toward those who persecuted us.²⁴⁰

Melaku explains that he and other leaders “had a heart of compassion” toward persecutors “because Jesus has taught us to love our enemies.” He remembers a visiting American teaching from Matthew 5. “The lessons we received helped us love,” he says, and helped “vaccinate” the church against bitterness toward those who opposed it. Selassie admits that as “a human being” what you might “feel from your flesh” can make it difficult to love persecutors, but overall, “by the very nature of what Jesus taught (Love your enemies, the people who persecute you), that’s very clear, so that wasn’t difficult.” Teru also credits “the Lord who has given us his heart...for these people, the heart of love...” With God’s help, Kelile says, “it was easy for me to love them. Of course there are times when you feel hurt...but God gives you healing and strengthens you.” Asked if it was hard to love her persecutors, Desta says, “Yeah, it’s only when Jesus really lives in us and helps us. It’s not easy, of course, but we have shown love.”²⁴¹

Teru found it especially challenging to love those who had once been part of the church but turned against it. She says that when some tried to cause problems for Kedir, “I was ready to fight them. I was acting like Peter, when they came to catch Jesus and Peter cut off the ear of Malchus. But Pastor Kedir, he was like Jesus. He didn’t want people who were persecuting him to be beaten up” or harmed in any way.²⁴²

Although Teku says that persecution sometimes “provoked” him and “I got angry,” he explains that the prayer of Jesus to forgive his oppressors “for they do not know what they are doing” and the apostle Paul’s observation that “the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers” encouraged him

²⁴⁰ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 70.

²⁴¹ Interviews 2, 4, 8, 11 and 17; In Interview 19 Tengene says, “The love that we received from Christ...was what kept us from hating the persecutors.” In Interview 9 Louam stresses the importance of “showing love to your enemies,” citing persecuted Romanian Christian Richard Wurmbrand as an example. He adds that, “love is really a powerful weapon to the leader.”

²⁴² Interviews 8 and 12.

to “have a compassionate mind and spirit toward those” who opposed the church and led him to pray for them. These themes – spiritual battle, empathy and prayer – recur in the source material.²⁴³

b. Spiritual warfare

Understanding persecution in the context of spiritual warfare, MKC leaders believed that they and their persecutors shared a common enemy who had already been defeated by Jesus. Berihun remembers that when the Derg seized power, its motto was “Let Ethiopia excel without any bloodshed.” He describes his shock when sixty-two government officials were “detained” and “massacred.” The bloodshed reminded him of violence in “countries in the Iron Curtain.” Referring to Satan, he says, “I knew that was the spirit of the enemy.” Recognizing that “God was on my side” and “God’s love was greater” than the enemy’s power to “lure people,” Berihun was not “intimidated” or “tempted to compromise,” because there is “no middle way.” One is either “with God or with the world.”²⁴⁴

A number of leaders explain their love for persecutors in relation to this spiritual warfare. Dawit emphasizes that no human being is his enemy, only Satan. Instead of fighting against people, he says, “I was battling with the spirit that works behind them. That was helping me a lot to not take people as my enemy.” Teku admits that he sometimes “tended to become judgmental” of those who opposed the church. When one persecutor died in a motor vehicle accident, he and others initially welcomed the news as a sign of God’s justice. Later, recognizing that persecutors “were blinded by the power of demons and by the power of sin,” they knew they needed to leave “the judgment just for God.” Gemechu summarizes how an awareness of spiritual conflict helped believers to love their persecutors: “The Christians knew that they were surrounded by the enemy of Christ and his followers...who were blinded by the spirit of this world,” enemies who need love.

Who is our enemy? You may say the enemy is those who are killing, imprisoning, and persecuting Christians and their leaders. The call of God cuts directly across our comfort, our plans and our security.

As the evangelical Christians went underground, they recognized that their enemy was not so much the people who opposed them as it was opposition to Christianity at a spiritual level. They referred to what the Scriptures call the spirit of antichrist (1 John 4:3).

²⁴³ Interview 21; Luke 23:34; 2 Cor 4:4.

²⁴⁴ Interview 3; In Interview 16 Hakim remarks that all churches are subject to spiritual attack, which may or may not be accompanied by physical persecution.

To love our enemies as Christ commanded and to not damage the church as the Body, we must first love them, yet we do not participate in their evil. When we are wronged, we are not to react in a spirit of hatred but in a way that shows we have values that are centered in Christ and his kingdom. Our action toward those who are unkind to us should be such that it might lead them to accept Christ as their Savior. Our uncontested tolerance may mean that they can kill us. Loving them means that by prayer and example they see Jesus in us.²⁴⁵

c. Prayer for persecutors

For MKC leaders, praying for their persecutors was an essential act of love. While the church showed kindness to those who opposed it in various ways, Kifle insists that “praying for them was the most important thing that we did.” Not only did it help leaders “to have an open heart to our persecutors,” fervent prayer “really softened their hearts and a number of them have come to accept Christ.” Zere says, “We asked for mercy for them, that God would be merciful and bring them back to him.” He recalls that like Jesus on the cross, believers prayed, “Forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.” Tengene says, “Because the Lord had renewed our mind and...our heart, instead of hating them we prayed for them. We interceded for them.” Kedir kept a notebook in which he wrote down the names of sixty-four persecutors so that he could pray for each one.”²⁴⁶

In addition to asking that God would “save us from them,” Solomon prayed for persecutors’ spiritual eyes to be opened. Teku also prayed for the healing of persecutors’ spiritual vision, and that “God would stand on their way, as he had done in the life of Saint Paul.” Leaders also prayed for the physical safety of persecutors. Berihun mentions “constantly praying for the communist regime.” He rejoices that God led some persecutors to faith in Christ and spared the lives of Derg government leaders when the administration fell in 1991. Although many communist party leaders were jailed, “almost all of them

²⁴⁵ Interviews 1 and 21; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 88. Speaking about kebele cadres and higher authorities who persecuted the church, Semer (Interview 15) says, “We had a loving heart and sympathy towards them because we knew that they were really acting under the influence of the enemy, of the devil, and they did not really understand what evil they were doing to us. So we prayed for them. We had sympathy and we tried to help them if they really had need. So we weren't bitter. We weren't hateful towards them.”

In Interview 16 Hakim reflects on the interaction between Mennonite and Pentecostal theologies in the response of MKC leaders to Marxist persecution. He notes that some who were influenced by a charismatic emphasis on the “Power of the Lord” shared James’ and John’s attitude toward those who rejected Jesus, praying “Send fire from heaven and burn them!” (Luke 9:54). While he says, “I could see that in their fervor,” it intermingled with a Mennonite theology that “the church can exist under any system.” He remembers that, “We did not try to change the government. We believed it could come to its senses. God has his own program.”

Although not praying against persecutors, in Interview 13 Zere remembers asking God to end the Derg regime. Inspired by Acts 16:26-27 in which the Lord shakes the prison, causing Paul and Silas’ chains to fall off, Zere prayed, “Lord, you have done this miracle...make the foundation of the Derg to shake and fall.”

²⁴⁶ Interviews 5, 12, 13 and 19.

survived death,” including Mengistu Haile Mariam. “Many heard the gospel in prison...God heard our prayers...None of them died, and many, many have accepted the Lord as their personal Saviour.”²⁴⁷

d. Empathy toward persecutors

Seeing their persecutors as victims of spiritual oppression and praying for them enabled MKC leaders to empathize with them as human beings in need of salvation. Louam says, “Of course we didn’t like...the way they were treating us...but we didn’t hate them as people. We tried to pray for them [and] ...to sympathize with them when they ran into trouble.” Interviewees identify factors that made it easier to love their persecutors. Some, like Teku, had themselves despised evangelical Christians before their conversion and to some degree understood the animosity directed against the church. Teru comments that “because they really weren’t knowledgeable about what they were doing...we were really sorry for them and we loved them.” A few note that some cadres, kebele authorities and other government workers were not ideological communists with personal animosity toward church members. Kelile says, “Most of them were in that position for their own selfish motives, not because they really believed in socialism...and we knew that they were doing the persecuting not because they really hated us, but they were...obeying the orders from the higher authorities, and so we were really sorry for them. We sympathized with them.”²⁴⁸

Selassie argues that because many who embraced communism did so out fear, it was not difficult to empathize with them. Berihun mentions that some Derg officials were secret “sympathizers of Christians,” and sometimes informed church leaders of government plans to harm believers, enabling them to escape. Tewodros suggests that in Wonji Shoa most “cadres were previously Christian,” and “were not as harsh” as in some other places. Even so,

...they wanted to fulfil the wishes of the Derg, but when they came, we tried to treat them as friends, as brothers and sisters that we knew before and so there wasn’t much confrontation between us. They came and said, “Don’t meet in large groups.” Still, they were trying to cause

²⁴⁷ Interviews 3, 18, and 21.

²⁴⁸ Interviews 4, 8, 9, 15 and 21. When one of Teku’s relatives first invited him to attend a worship service at Sion Church in Addis Ababa, he resisted. “My attitude toward the Pentecostal believers was hatred,” he says. In Interview 20 Mamo remembers a co-worker who admitted, “I am a Marxist because of my bread.” At a workplace indoctrination session, a leader was teaching on religion, idealism, class conflict and historical materialism. When Mamo asked a question (“You said Marxism is dynamic. What will happen after communism?”), the leader said he would get counsel from his boss before giving his answer. After the session, he met Mamo and asked, “Why do you ask that question? Do you think I believe it?”

In Interview 18 Hakim says, “I don’t remember becoming bitter, because if they don’t have the light, they don’t have the light. Some were not really for the cause of the revolution. Some were exercising their power for personal gain.”

some frustration and suffering to us. And we tried to treat them as human beings who have gone astray...we tried to be...kind to them.²⁴⁹

Before the revolution, Jazarah rented out three rooms on her family compound. When the government expropriated them and assigned them to Derg party officials, she told them, "My argument is with the government, not with you. You are just renting. You are living in this house. I don't having any personal quarrel with you." She invited them to her children's birthday parties and attended parties in their homes. When one cadre was engaged to be married, Jazarah helped him prepare for his wedding.²⁵⁰

Asked if it was ever hard to love his persecutors, Dawit says, "No...I always had sympathy for them....If something happened to them, I knew where they would go. Hell was just waiting for them. That stirred my soul." Would Jesus take revenge on persecutors if he met them, he asks. "Never," he says, "He prays for them. He said, 'Don't consider this sin,' so I am not to consider that sin. My part is to pray for those who are persecuting us."²⁵¹

e. Treating persecutors fairly and kindly

MKC leaders showed love to persecutors in a variety of ways. Kifle describes how he and others would "sympathize with them" when they lost a loved one and celebrate when they had a wedding in the family, "loving people, so that they would understand our heart, that we were really open to them. If they came and asked, we of course told them the good news, the gospel." Speaking of cadres and other politically active people, Abebech says, "We began to accept those that were persecuting us – with love. They wouldn't, of course, come to our funerals or whatever. They wouldn't participate in our burial rites, but we went to their funerals, and that showed them that we were sympathetic to them and loved them and wouldn't really look on them as enemies."²⁵²

²⁴⁹ Interview 2, 3 and 6; in Interview 8 Teru also recognizes that persecution of evangelical Christians was driven by fear, although rather than focussing on fear as a motivator for individuals to embrace communism, as Selassie does, she says believers were targeted "because they were afraid of us."

²⁵⁰ Interview 14.

²⁵¹ Interview 1.

²⁵² Interviews 5 and 10; in Interview 4 Kelile likewise says that when a persecutor "had a car accident or if they lost someone that they loved, we would sympathize with them. We went and comforted them...We were sorry for them, and for some, individually we would witness to them of the love of Christ...and they were influenced by our lives, some of them." In Interview 11 Desta remembers a kebele chairman who was harassing evangelical Christians for refusing to say revolutionary slogans. When she was imprisoned, some of her neighbours advocated for her release, saying, "Well, her husband is in jail. Why do you put her in prison? How can the children fare?" The authorities released her, but the kebele chairman said, "The measure we should take is to burn this house down." Soon after this, one of his sons died. Desta says, "Immediately I went to his house and wept and mourned with him and showed love." In Interview 13 Zere describes the zeal of the chairman of the kebele youth group who would round up young men and

As an accountant at a paper mill, Kelile tried to treat co-workers fairly despite their actions against him. He says, “There were cadres at the paper mill, but I never showed any partiality against them. I treated every worker in there equally. They felt embarrassed or ashamed because they knew they were kind of trying to persecute me or...do something against me, but I always showed them love and respect.” Seeking the good of the company as a whole, Kelile advised some of the administrators about improving their practices. “This is not really good for the people you are serving,” he told them. He says, “I believe that God gave me the chance to work at the paper mill. So I always fear God...I should serve him and serve the people he has given me, equally, with respect...What he has given me is a responsibility to serve all equally, without partiality.”²⁵³

When Bekele refused to falsify documents for a hospital employee, the man made a thinly veiled denunciation of evangelical Christians in a political meeting. After Bekele exposed the underlying truth to the assembly, the man was sent to “prison for ten months, and they tortured him.” He says, “I felt sorry for that.” Although he wanted the former employee’s unjust scheme to be stopped, Bekele had not intended him harm. He says, “I found him...in the hospital, admitted because they tortured him very badly...So I used to go back and forth to visit him. We used to take care of his family...They weren't church members, but they were our neighbours.” Teketel Chakiso describes love as a dynamic gift from God that persecution could not quench:

The Communists tried to eradicate Christianity from Ethiopian soil. They closed the churches and took all their property. They imprisoned our leaders. Still, amazingly, they could not blockade God's love that flowed into the heart of the believers. The Spirit of God was burning with a fire for evangelism, convincing and empowering true believers to witness to Christ in words and actions.²⁵⁴

f. Persecutors converting to Christianity

Many persecutors made commitments to Jesus Christ in response to love shown by MKC members and leaders. In Wonji Gerfersa alone about fifty members of the communist party joined the church while the Derg was still in power. One party member, Dobamo Arficho, was a tractor driver whose

women “and put them in prison and beat them up.” Zere says, “One day after being so cruel and taking severe measures against Christians, he was on his way to [Sodere hot mineral springs]...He was going in his car and the car overturned and he died immediately. And we were really sorry for him, that he died in this way. We went to their house and mourned with them, comforted them.”

²⁵³ Interview 4.

²⁵⁴ Interview 22; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 72.

helper began telling him about Jesus and the gift of eternal life. He says, "I rejected him many times and frightened him with many evil words. Finally I reported him to the boss for harassing me." Even so, his co-worker "continued to display love which seemed to increase in the face of hatred and verbal abuse."

Finding his helper's "character and manner attractive," he says, "Finally, I gave up." Dobamo testifies,

The word that came through that man penetrated into my heart and the love of Jesus poured into my heart at that time. I really sensed my conversion. I realized that God's love was beyond my imagination. After I received Jesus Christ as my personal Savior, that man handed [me] over to one of the charge elders. This church elder was teaching me individually how to follow Jesus in my own house until the fall of communist government.

Getachew was also attracted to Christianity by the love that Christians showed to each other and to their enemies. He says, "No one had told me about Jesus and the saving gospel, yet the love of Christians drew me to God. Before I knew God, I was attracted by the love of Christians."²⁵⁵

Working at a government school, Gemechu needed to attend monthly political "awakening" sessions. At one, he and two other Christian teachers were accused of being CIA agents, "imperialist dogs," and *Mete*, an Amharic term disparaging the followers of a "foreign religion." When the group drafted a statement of accusation against the three evangelical believers, one of the party officials needed to deliver it to a local political office, but lacked transportation. "Do you want my bicycle?" Gemechu asked him. "Take it," he said, holding out his bicycle key. Sometime later, while teaching in a community more than five hundred kilometres from Wonji, the man was moved by a presentation of the gospel. Gemechu writes: "Because of his family connections among the believers at Wonji and his previous strong opposition to the Christian message there, he felt compelled to travel to Wonji and make public his decision to become a Christian." Attending a Sunday morning worship service at which Gemechu presented an invitation to faith, the man came forward, weeping, and received Jesus Christ as his Saviour. He told Gemechu, "You touched me the day that you gave me your key for that bicycle." Gemechu notes that the three Derg

²⁵⁵ Abera Ertiro, "Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth," 35-40; Bedru Hussein, "Non-formal Theological Education: the Meserete Kristos Church Experience," in *Theological Education on Five Continents: Anabaptist Perspectives*, ed. Nancy R. Heisey and Daniel S. Schipani, 57-83 (Strasbourg, France: Mennonite World Conference, 1997); Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 61-65; Nathan Hege, and Richard D. Thiessen, "Meserete Kristos Church," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, November 2014, Web (25 May 2015) http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/meserete_kristos_church; Lehman, "Aster Debossie," 25-26.

officials involved in the accusations against him at his school have all come to faith in Christ and have approached him individually to seek his forgiveness “for the distress they caused me during the Derg.”²⁵⁶

A teacher who ridiculed Teru for her faith when she was in school became mayor of Adama (Nazareth) and was known for his cruelty toward evangelical Christians. Teru prayed for him and other prominent persecutors, “that God would give them the chance to hear the gospel.” When the Derg fell, the former mayor and other communist leaders were imprisoned. Teru gave each of them a Bible. She says,

For nine months I taught them the Bible in prison. I was pregnant, but every week I would go there, and the persecutors...listened to the message from the Bible and I taught them for nine months. At the end of the nine months, I had to deliver my baby...but I invited guest speakers to serve them there, and when I gave birth, I sent porridge. You know, when you have delivered a baby, you are supposed to invite people to share a portion of porridge, with butter in it. So I sent two trays of porridge to the prisoners that I she had taught. So that's how I loved them. I wanted to bring them to Christ.

A number of prisoners responded positively to the gospel, including the former mayor of Adama, who told Teru, “It's your Lord who has kept me, protected me...It's your Lord who has blessed me now.”²⁵⁷

D. Creativity: Learning on the go

According to Quinn, people normally assume that they already have the knowledge and expertise necessary for success. Internally closed, they ignore external signals for change. Those in the Fundamental State of Leadership, however, embrace a learning stance: experimenting, seeking honest feedback, adapting and reaching higher levels of discovery, awareness, competence and vision. To explore external openness, interviewees were asked, “What changes did you need to make in your leadership as a result of the persecution? What helped you learn and grow as a leader during that time?” Reflections on learning also arose in response to other interview questions and in other sources.

The external openness of MKC leaders under persecution has been evident throughout this chapter, including their priority on personal growth as disciples of Jesus Christ and as leaders, in creative ministry strategy, reliance on resources and direction from God, communication and discernment in leadership teams, and extensive training programs. In addition, the external openness of MKC leaders can be seen in their 1) valuing of wisdom and desire to learn, 2) awareness of their changing political and social

²⁵⁶ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 89-93; Interview 1; in Interview 7 Yacob recalls a leading Derg official who caused a lot of problems for the church but lost his position with the fall of the regime. When he and his family faced financial hardship, Yacob enrolled his children in a program that enabled them to go to receive clothing and go to school. “That really broke his heart” and “brought him to Christ in his life.”

²⁵⁷ Interview 8.

context, 3) enthusiasm for study, 4) willingness to receive feedback and correction from others, 5) ministry innovations in changing circumstances, 6) tactics for protecting church members and concealing ministry activity, 7) astute relations with authorities and, 8) receptivity and obedience to the voice of God.

1. Seeking wisdom

Research participants identify wisdom as an essential quality for leaders, a gift received through dependence on God, anchored in biblical knowledge but also formed by attentiveness to context and study of diverse fields of knowledge. “Wisdom is very necessary,” Kelile says, emphasizing leaders’ ongoing need for God’s guidance amid the uncertainties of leadership in the Derg era. He testifies that “God is a God of wisdom and strength,” who “helped us to go through all those difficult situations and times so that we could honour and glorify him.”²⁵⁸

For MKC leaders, the pursuit of wisdom is intimately connected with external openness to God, actively practiced through disciplines of prayer and Bible study. Yacob says, “I read my Bible. I prayed to God every day and he led me in the decisions I made...God gave me the wisdom that I needed...” Louam emphasizes that “prayer is really very, very important to find strength from the Lord, to find wisdom and guidance.” Dawit describes a heightened sense of dependence on God because of his “lack of knowledge.” Because he did not have seminary training or education in psychology, sociology, anthropology or politics, he recognized his need for the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, “the only one” who could “lead us in the right way.” With gratitude, he says, “God gave us wisdom. The power of the Holy Spirit led us. We don’t know how we were led, but sometimes it was in a unique way.”²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ Interviews 4; Kelile recalls the stresses of leadership as a church school administrator and elder team member in the early years of the revolution, including frequent summons to the local kebele office and his effort to stop the bullying and beating of church members. He says, “It was hard. Sometimes I would question God: ‘Why all this persecution? Why all this suffering? Why should these cadres come and bother me? I have decided to work for your kingdom...stand in the Christian faith firmly, but why don’t you stop all this threatening and problems?’ But God said, ‘I’ll give you the strength and the wisdom. You have to be patient and stand with me. I will be with you.’”

In Interview 6 Tewodros similarly attests that God “is the God of wisdom.” In Interview 13 Zere stresses that “Wisdom is important. Wisdom comes from the Lord and from his Word, and from the Holy Spirit,” adding that it “is one quality that one needs during persecution.” In Interview 17 Melaku agrees that “wisdom is very important: how to deal with different problems as they arise.”

²⁵⁹ Interviews 1, 7, 9 and 13; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa, 76-77, 91, recalls asking “God for understanding and wisdom” and receiving God’s provision of “words and wisdom” as Jesus had promised in Luke 21:14-15. In Interviews 7, 13, 14 and 22, participants express appreciation for the wisdom of other church leaders. Jazarah says, “I am really amazed at God’s wisdom, and he gave of his wisdom to leaders.” Abera Ertiro, “History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth,” 35, identifies “wise and strong” student leaders who “organized and encouraged Christian students” in group programs during school breaks. In Interview 8 Teru testifies

Gemechu notes that “Given the opposition which the church was experiencing, her leaders felt particular need of training for their ministry.” Leaders like Hakim advocated for an understanding of wisdom drawing on diverse fields of study, anchored in a biblically grounded maturity. Whereas “some said, ‘to use wisdom is secular,’” Hakim affirms, “we believed in wisdom.” Teku describes how senior MKC leaders identified his leadership potential, challenged his resistance to education and helped fund his return to school when he was ready to do so. While promoting a broad-based quest for knowledge, MKC leaders recognized the limits of human understanding. In 1986, Kassa Agafari said, “We try to use the wisdom God gives us in planning for meetings, but we live by faith that God will care for us.”²⁶⁰

Teru says: “We really grew and learned a lot during the period of persecution.” Jazarah gives thanks that “The Lord helped us. We grew together. We learned a lot.” Nyala emphasizes that leaders must not become complacent about their knowledge or wisdom, but remain externally open: “A leader should always really be a person willing to learn more, learn every day from the Word of God, so that he grows in his Christian life. So he should be a learning person. Not only should he be a spiritual man (he has of course accepted Christ as his Saviour) but he has to grow so that he can help others.”²⁶¹

2. Awareness of their changing political and social context

Although Ethiopian political and social culture had been evolving for decades under the modernizing influence of Haile Selassie and his predecessors, the socialist revolution profoundly disrupted the status quo, thrusting the nation into uncertain, rapidly changing territory. Kelile says, “The coming of the socialist revolution in Ethiopia was a new thing. It was a strange thing for all of us. We didn't know

that God “gave us the wisdom and the guidance” necessary for serving others. In Interview 10 Abebech describes the need for wisdom when offering ministry in a home that included both believers and those hostile to evangelical faith.

²⁶⁰ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 57; Interview 16; Hege, *Beyond our prayers*, 171, 206. According Hege, when MKC leaders describe their decisions in the Derg era, they frequently say, “It is not that we were so wise; the grace of God helped us,” often testifying that after they prayed, God would lead them to do the right thing.

In Interview 21 Teku describes how in 1976, three months into his studies at Addis Ababa Technical School, a political riot led to its closure for half a year. At that point, Teku says, “My heart was closed for secular education. I abandoned my education for three and a half years.” Nazareth MKC leaders approached him three times. First they asked, “Why don't you continue your education?” Teku responded: “Education which is more than my Bible study would lead into hell.” On a second visit, perhaps in 1978, they asked, “If you don't continue your education, why don't you work?” Turning down an invitation to help deliver wheat from Mennonite Central Committee, Teku said, “Any type of work that separates me from Bible study would lead into hell.” A third time, when Teku was serving in Bahir Dar with MKC's Three Months for Christ program, Bible Academy teacher Bedru Hussein asked him, “Why don't you continue your education now?” Teku recalls, “When he asked me, I received a type of enlightenment in my mind” but complained, “How I am going to learn? I don't have money.” Bedru acknowledged there may be obstacles but asked, “Are you willing to continue your education?” Teku says that when he gave his yes, church leaders made it possible for him to attend Nazareth Bible Academy, paving the way for further opportunities in ministry and education.

²⁶¹ Interviews 8, 12 and 14.

much about communism or socialism, but there was one truth that I realized that I held dear to my heart, and it was...Whatever [the] circumstance...God wanted us to know that he was going to be with us.”²⁶²

For some MKC leaders, earlier encounters with Marxism provided an interpretive lens through which to understand the claims and actions of the Derg regime. Hakim remembers the late 1960s and early 1970s as a time when, “the secular world was searching” for direction. “I had rubbed shoulders with the revolutionaries in the university,” he says. Debates with these students helped him to understand the philosophical underpinning of communism. Alemu notes that “Many naïve Christians had viewed socialism as a benign system that would turn Ethiopia into the “bread basket of Africa.” Selassie observes that some presented socialism as though it were

...Christianity in another form because it is so good. “The rich people are too rich, while the poor don't have anything to eat.” So, you know, this looked like justice – and people didn't see the spirit behind it. Some people thought, “Oh, this is what we're looking for.” But you have to see beyond the mist and when you are in leadership, you have to be very careful what impression you give people...There was a book on Marxism and Christianity, comparing the two, how similar they are and so on. At one point we said, “Okay. To clear the cloud we need to have people who are versed in this come and explain to us what dialectical materialism is...and so on.” And the differences started to be clearer and clearer and clearer: that there is no God in this one, but here everything revolves around our Lord Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God.

Selassie points out that even “the national leaders of the country themselves were being educated in this new philosophy.” Speaking about the church, he says, “we were kind of groping in the dark and then eventually things started to be clearer” as differences between Marxism and Christianity became more obvious. There was also need for discernment at the local level. What did faithfulness to Jesus look like within this shifting social and political milieu? At what points should the church participate in Derg programs and comply with government directives? When should it not? The authorities’ reactions to decisions of the church were unpredictable. In addition, church members “needed to be very careful” about various emerging anti-establishment groups, “more revolutionary than the revolution itself.” Selassie points out that “Those mushrooming movements got into trouble. They clashed with the government and many young people were killed because of that.” It was essential, then, for leaders to give wise guidance to church members, “especially the younger generation,” not only to ensure that they had strong biblical grounding, but that they were equipped to live out their faith in such an unstable environment.²⁶³

²⁶² Interview 4.

²⁶³ Interviews 2 and 16; Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 231; in Interview 4, Kelile also recalls that the vision for Ethiopian socialism had particular appeal for citizens in the early stages of the revolution:

3. Enthusiasm for study

Although many MKC leaders were already committed to ongoing learning, the uncertainties of the revolutionary context spurred them to more passionate, focused study of a) the Bible, b) Marxist and Christian literature, and c) the experience of Christians in other communist settings.

a. Bible study

As seen above, MKC leaders developed great passion for individual and corporate study of the Bible in the Derg years, spurred by pursuit of personal faithfulness to Jesus Christ and a desire to hear and obey God's voice. Alemu says that, "in preparing teaching materials and getting ready to teach different groups, I had to dig into the Word of God. I had to study the Word and prepare. That kept me on my toes." Zere believes that before the revolution, he and others were not "as serious with our Bible reading" and prayer, "but we realized that studying the Word of God was really very, very important for us..."²⁶⁴

b. Marxist and Christian literature

To equip themselves and the church for witness to Christ in a revolutionary context, a number of MKC leaders studied Marxist philosophy and Christian literature arising from the experience of persecuted believers in other settings. Solomon pursued in depth knowledge of definitive Marxist texts in order to prepare relevant apologetics material for the church. "I was mainly concerned with the philosophy of dialectical materialism," he says. At annual multi-denominational leadership conferences hosted by

When the Derg came, they thought a new day was dawning, hope was coming. It was going to be a time of freedom...of equality...and people at the beginning thought this was really true. It was hard for us to tell them that no government is going to satisfy their needs, their physical needs [and] spiritual needs. They weren't willing to hear us at the beginning. That was a big challenge, you know: "Just be careful. Just be patient. You will find out that this is not really the truth." But people were not willing at the beginning. So that was really hard.

Even among church members...some of them believed, "Oh, this is going to be a wonderful time of freedom, of worshipping," because there was persecution of evangelicals during Haile Selassie's reign. People thought that things were going to be much, much, much better with Ethiopian socialism. Ethiopian socialism was sort of deceptive, you know. People were hoodwinked. They thought things were going to get better; we tried to tell them that this should be looked at wisely, but they wouldn't listen.

In Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*, Kedir says, "When the revolution came, we knew very well that it was going to be very, very bad, and very harsh, because we had been hearing about what was happening to Christians in the communist countries, and in Eastern Europe."

²⁶⁴ Interviews 10 and 13; in Interview 15 Semer also says that "before the closure of the church, we didn't really study our Bible deeply. We just read certain Scripture verses; we came on Sundays to attend Sunday School and worship, but during the persecution, we really studied so many topics...in the Bible. And we realized that God would really give us the strength we needed to stand against the buffeting from the devil."

Nazareth Bible Academy, Solomon and others offered seminars and written hand-outs to help participants better understand their political and social milieu.²⁶⁵

Interviewees found encouragement and inspiration in accounts of Christian faithfulness under persecution, such as *Tortured for Christ* by Richard Wurmbrand, *China: Christian Students Face the Revolution*, by David Adeney, *The Eve of Persecution*, by Basilea Schlink, *The Spiritual Man* and other books by Watchman Nee. Louam says that Christian books “helped me a lot.” Teku remembers that reading *Foxes Book of Martyrs* accounts of believers who “suffered for the glory of the Lord... strengthened my spirit.” He adds that it helped him clarify his resolve to be faithful. MKC leaders translated a number of Christian books into Amharic to reach a wider Ethiopian audience. Alemu, who was part of the team that created teaching materials for the church in the mid-1970s, says that “We tried to prepare all kinds of material for the coming years of suffering, persecution,” drawing from the experience of Christians in China, Romania and the Soviet Union. Writing new material and translating pertinent literature into Amharic, Alemu and others wanted to ensure that valuable resources would be not only available, but “be easily understood by ordinary Christians,” not only those who were well-educated, so “they could read and understand and prepare for the challenges that were coming.”²⁶⁶

As a youth leader, Teku eagerly devoured all the Christian reading material he could find and encouraged others to the same. One night he went without sleep, spending ten consecutive hours reading. He read “selected books” that “were being distributed among the church leaders.” Because of that – and his Bible reading – Teku says, “I don't remember when I was discouraged as far as the persecution was concerned.” He adds, “I appreciate the vision given from God to those education committee members,” who “were reading books...translating [them] into Amharic and distributing them among church leaders.” Bekele is also grateful for “brothers who were older than us,” who “read some books” and were able to interpret the revolution and “tell us why it has happened...you know, ‘This is like what happened in Russia, what happened in China.’” He remembers that,

²⁶⁵ Interviews 10 and 18; Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 231-232.

²⁶⁶ David Adeney, *China: Christian Students Face the Revolution* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973); Basilea Schlink, *The Eve of Persecution* (London: Lakeland, 1974); Watchman Nee, *The Spiritual Man* (New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1968); Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ* (Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Books, 1967); Interviews 3, 9, 10, 21 and 22. Berihun says, “As a young man in the mission compound, I used to read many biographies: of J. L. Moody, Finney, and most of the prominent revivalists, John Wesley. I always used to hear Billy Graham on the radio.”

As soon as the Derg took power and...they said, "We are communist," we began to read different books, like *Tortured for Christ* – those kinds of books from China, from Soviet Union. So we were almost ready that the persecution would come soon, and the communists may affect us more. We were really praying about it. We had been reading different books, nurturing ourselves, preparing ourselves.²⁶⁷

c. The experience of Christians in other communist settings

While drawing on relevant literature and the expertise of church members conversant in Marxist philosophy and Christian faith, MKC leaders also took advantage of opportunities to interact more directly with the persecuted church in other communist settings. At the 1978 Mennonite World Conference in Wichita, Kansas, Russian believers invited Ethiopian church leaders to visit their country. A delegation of six MKC leaders travelled to the Soviet Union for a three-week learning tour in early 1979, gaining insight into the dynamics of underground churches, evangelism in a communist context and strategies for helping leaders and evangelists adapt to the challenges of atheism. To build on this learning, MKC asked Eastern Mennonite Missions to send Harley Wagler, a missionary with experience of communism in Romania and Yugoslavia, to offer teaching on Christianity and Marxism in Ethiopia. In meetings and seminars in Nazareth and Addis Ababa, Wagler discussed ways in which churches could reorganize themselves and their ministries for effective Christian witness under communism, based on the experience of believers in Russia and Eastern Europe. Alemu says, "That really was a big help for all of us." Solomon also mentions that MKC benefited from hearing the experience of a Chinese Christian woman who was in Ethiopia.²⁶⁸

4. Willingness to receive feedback and correction

Teku reflects on the challenge of remaining open to feedback and correction. On one occasion, he became enthused about a paper recounting a vision in which demons received instruction from their boss (similar to C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*). Teku was convinced that its creative exposition of Satan's tactics gave invaluable perspective to Christians in spiritual battle. He had it retyped to fit onto five pages, duplicated it and began distributing it among believers. Three evangelists, including his spiritual mentor

²⁶⁷ Interviews 21 and 22; Teku describes how, as he read literature written by persecuted Christians in other contexts, the Holy Spirit prepared him for the possibility of capture, imprisonment or death, leading him to a decision: "Though the challenge comes...I will accept whatever it is. I was completely decisive: even when death comes, if I couldn't escape it, I have to face it."

²⁶⁸ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 167-168; Michael Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Lehman, "Aster Debossie," 28-29; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 256-257; Interviews 10, 18, 20 and 21. Given the rootedness of both Amharic and Russian cultures in long histories with Christendom, one key insight from Soviet church leaders was to use wedding and funerals as opportunities for the public preaching of the gospel, because religious discourse was expected in these settings.

Kedir, told him to “stop teaching and distributing the paper” and compelled him to gather papers he had giving out. Initially, Teku says, “It provoked me. I was a little angry. ‘So am I not teaching God's truth?’” Still, when he did what they asked, they commended him for his obedience and,

They told me that the content of the paper is not for laypersons. It is for top-level...church leaders. So we should not teach it...for example, I quoted it for one of my friends who was a singer in a choir...“You see how they are fighting us?” My motive was positive, but he was discouraged. When I told him how demons are fighting us, he said, “Wow. If they fight us in such a way, who can resist them?” You see? He became discouraged. So what the church leaders...advised me was right.

Teku expresses appreciation for the mentoring and guidance he received from MKC leadership supervisors and colleagues. Even so, he recalls moments when he felt “misunderstood by some of my colleagues.” He also describes the openness of senior leaders to receive feedback. Tadesse, for example, diligently warned young people to keep healthy boundaries in their relationships with the opposite sex, recommending that there be a table between them when talking together. Because of the intensity of Tadesse’s instruction, however, youth and young adults were afraid of him. With a smile, Teku remembers that if members of the opposite sex were standing together and one saw the evangelist, they would say, “Oh, oh; Pastor Tadesse came in,” and scatter. In the late 1970s, Teku brought this to his pastor’s attention: ““Pastor, you see, when you come to the young people, [they]...are running from you. They are afraid of you. If they are afraid of you, who are you going to serve?” I asked him this and he was deeply moved.”²⁶⁹

5. Ministry innovation in changing circumstances

The external openness of MKC leaders is obvious in their creative responses to the conditions of the Derg years. Evident throughout this chapter – in strategies for evangelism, discipleship and leadership

²⁶⁹ Interview 21; Teku also describes an incident in 1988, nine years after his experience with the spiritual warfare paper, when as a new full-time minister in Addis Ababa he “energetically gathered...people together” to teach them about the return of Jesus. As people were drawn to his study groups in three locations, church leaders told him to “Stop every program you are teaching about the Second Coming.” Teku asked a church leader “whom I loved” for an explanation. The man just said, “We church leaders decided, ‘stop.’” “What is the reason?” Teku asked. “No reason.” He remembers: “It was very offensive for me. It was five months after I became a full-time...evangelist. So, they were my friends. We were working together previously as elders...So why are they doing this? I obeyed.” Group participants complained about the cancellation of the program, but instead of sharing his frustration with them, Teku wrote five pages of complaint for the church leaders. Among other things, he asked: “Am I not a person called from God? Am I not a full-time minister? Didn't the Holy Spirit lead me? Why are you being like that?” He says: “It was a complaint...I was on the way to abandon my ministry at the highest level; however, I prayed...Immediately when they told me to stop teaching, I knelt down before God for four hours, continuously, from almost 10 o'clock until 2...but I didn't pray properly. I was asking the question, ‘Why they are, why they are doing like that?’” Although he struggled with the church leaders’ decision, he did not give them his letter of complaint. He says sometime later, he received peace about the situation when the Holy Spirit gave him insight into the danger for the study group if it had continued to grow as it had under the conditions of persecution. He remembers, “It was an offensive time for me, but I know God gave me his grace that I passed that one.”

formation, creating and distributing literature, interactions with authorities, teamwork, and expressions of love toward church members and persecutors – this creativity gave birth to countless innovations in ministry. Probably most significant and transformational was the transition to a cell-based church structure. While small Bible study and prayer groups were already part of church experience in the 1970s, with the closure of MKC they became indispensable building blocks for church life.

In 1979 and 1980, evangelist Ijigu Woldegebreiel sensed the Holy Spirit telling him that MKC would be closed and urging him to help to prepare the church. With the blessing of the elders at the Addis Ababa Kebena congregation, he organized a three day seminar on cell group ministry for 79 people at Mekane Yesus Seminary. A committee (chaired by Meseret Endeshaw, a strong advocate for an inductive Bible study method she had learned at Hesston College in Kansas) was then formed to launch a network of cell groups in the city. At a meeting to organize leaders for house fellowships, police came and arrested many of them, imprisoning some for six months. Remaining leaders went on to form home groups. By the time the church was closed, about twenty groups were meeting in Addis Ababa. In 1982, amid the initial shock and confusion after the arrest of Executive Committee members and the outlawing of the church, small groups of MKC members met to pray and encourage each other. Still, it took a number of months for the church as a whole to regroup around a cohesive plan for effective ministry out of public view.²⁷⁰

After the church was closed, members of an MKC women's fellowship in Addis Ababa prayed all night. Through a prophetic word, they heard the Lord tell them to continue their work and trust him for protection. Organizing women into groups of ten, they initially arranged for evangelists to teach them, but with a too few evangelists for the task, women were encouraged to serve as leaders. When kebele officials began threatening the women, church leaders asked them to suspend the meetings. The women were persistent, however, expressing confidence that the Lord had led them into this ministry. Church leaders conceded, but asked them to limit groups to six participants. Working with the women's committee, the elders soon began assigning men to the groups, with both men and women serving in leadership roles.²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 193-195, 203-204; in Interview 5, Kifle also refers to leadership training for cell group ministry prior to MKC being closed.

²⁷¹ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 190-191; Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 56-57 describes the Wonji Gefersa leaders' use of focus groups in the congregation as part of the process of developing a plan for cell group ministry in that community.

At the initiative of Nazareth MKC evangelist Kedir Delchume, representatives from ten congregations gathered to create new leadership and ministry structures for the underground church. With Executive Committee members in prison, the group appointed a seven member Evangelism Committee to give strategic direction to the church. Its organizational foundation would be cell groups of five to seven members meeting for two or three hours a week to study the Bible, pray, equip and encourage each other as disciples of Jesus. Two to four cell groups would gather monthly as a house fellowship at sites chosen to avoid attention; these became occasions for celebrating baptisms, the Lord's Supper, receiving ministry training and seeking revival. A coordinator oversaw house fellowships in a particular kebele. Groups in a number of kebeles were shepherded by a leader for the *kefetegna*, the largest municipal residential area under the Derg. Any local church with more than five hundred members would be divided into two in order to better facilitate pastoral care. The Derg's closure of fourteen public church meeting places in 1982 thus paved the way for hundreds of new gathering centres in MKC homes.²⁷²

Evangelism Committee members put considerable energy into seeking out scattered MKC members and organizing them into cell groups. Some members simply needed to be made aware of the church's plans for reorganization; others were afraid to be publicly identified as evangelical Christians. Alemu explains that leaders would bring members together in small groups to renew fellowship and strengthen unity, sometimes eating together after sharing the Word of God to "bring a sense of togetherness." In the context of the underground cell structure, the Evangelism Committee prioritized the development and support of a number of ministries, particularly concerning visitation, Bible study, women, prayer, worship services, new believers, pastoral care and counselling.²⁷³

Cell groups became transformative settings for individual believers and the church as a whole. Gemechu explains that MKC leaders described their vision for these groups using biological imagery:

²⁷² Interviews 3, 4, 9, 14 and 15; Alemu Checole, "Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa," 232-233; Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 47-48, 54, 65-66, says that groups were expected to meet twice a week, once focussed on biblical teaching and once for prayer. In Wonji Gefersa, cell group were organized according to age and educational background, with one group for children four to six years old, another for those ages seven to nine, and another for ten to twelve year-olds. Thirteen and fourteen year-olds studied Christian faith in more depth and prepared for baptism. Among adults, there were cell gatherings for group leaders, elders and deacons, new believers, youth, evangelists, and worship and prayer leaders. Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 188-189, 197-198; Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 260-261; the "Evangelism Committee" was transformed into an "Executive Committee" in 1987. Semi-annually, beginning on February 21, 1983, the Evangelism Committee gathered with representatives from every MKC congregation in a General Church Council.

²⁷³ Alemu Checole, "Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa," 232-233; Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 53-54, 73-74; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 190, 233; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 261-262; Interviews 10 and 12.

Connections between small nuclei of people bound them closely together in spiritual cells, nurturing the moral and spiritual level of the people who belonged to them. The cells were also seen as essential to lifting the moral and spiritual level of the church as a whole. Christian character was understood to be dependent upon Christian relationships, so connections with a spiritual cell group provided a first step out of spiritual loneliness and individualism.

Interviewees describe how these gatherings enabled greater attention to the discipleship of church members than had been common in earlier MKC experience. A prayer group leader remembers that before the church was closed, some members “did not even know to say grace at mealtimes.” Although they participated in Sunday worship, they may not have understood the significance of baptism, the Lord’s Supper or basic Christian doctrine. Within the cell groups, however, they received practical biblical teaching. Bible study and prayer were integral to each cell group’s routine. They would often spend a day every month fasting and praying. Many were also involved in additional all-night prayer meetings in which participants might only sleep for an hour or two before going to work the next morning.²⁷⁴

Bedru Hussein notes that the shift to a home-based church experience involved a significant change in thinking for MKC members, who traditionally associated “church” with corporate worship in a publicly designated building and understood “home” as the domain of family rather than worship.²⁷⁵

Beyene Mulatu is grateful for the impact of persecution on the settled patterns of ministry in MKC because it paved the way for a new work of God. Reflecting on the many people who came to faith in Jesus Christ during the underground years, he says, “It was a special movement of God, something that we had not seen before.” Having served in various church institutions since 1962, thirty-five years later he marveled at the contrast between early MKC experience and the Derg years. “Before this, believers were few, and it was hard work to get people to accept the gospel and to keep them following on with the Lord.

²⁷⁴ Interviews 8 and 15; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 54-55, 65-66; Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Lehman, “Aster Debossie,” 24; Tesfaye Lerebo remembers that before the Derg era, he gave little attention to the Bible. After the closure of the church, however, he says, “the cell group meeting was special to me. I became more deeply rooted in my faith and my entire Christian living was transformed. The cell group meeting led me to know God more personally rather than simply following him in the crowd. I was blessed spiritually and materially. The teaching and praying truly drew me to God. Do you know? I found the power to resist the pressures from the spirit of atheism.”

In Interview 1 Dawit explains how MKC leaders helped believers develop their own spiritual disciplines: “We just educated people, till...they had their own Bible study...their own morning devotion...their own prayer. [Every] home...is a prayer home. If somebody comes, they just pray. They don’t chat and go. They pray. So the church became a praying church.”

²⁷⁵ Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 56, notes, however that the Wonji Gefersa MKC had a long tradition of having services within the homes of church members; Kassa Agafari, “A Story of Perseverance in Ethiopia,” 17-19, Interviews 3 and 19: the church in Addis Ababa created a special leadership position – Gubegna (watchers) – men and women who made home visits to believers in one of six different areas of the city, and organized them into cell groups.

Now it seems that things just happened.” Persecution disrupted normal patterns of church management. In retrospect, Beyene explains, “I realize we tried to shape our church by writing a constitution, so our church would appear proper, having a clear administrative structure that we could how to anybody and say, ‘This is what we have.’ Chuckling, he adds, “But God didn’t want it that way; he did it his own way, and we are thankful for that. We had to forget all our paperwork.”²⁷⁶

Selassie considers how persecution and church growth spur learning and growth in leaders: “You had to kind of pioneer as a leader. I am sure we made mistakes along the way, but that was okay. These were innocent mistakes. But then we rebounded back and continued on – and of course the stability was from just staying together, and then prayer and focusing on God, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”²⁷⁷

6. Strategies for protecting church members and concealing ministry activity

Attentive to their context, MKC leaders used a variety of strategies for protecting church members and concealing their ministries from the authorities, including a) gathering information, assessing risks and equipping others to use discretion, b) establishing protocols for church gatherings, c) limiting the spread of information about the church, and d) contextualizing appearance and presentation of personal identity.

a. Gathering information, assessing risks and equipping others to use discretion

To enable the church to function effectively and avoid unnecessary suffering, MKC leaders not only needed broad knowledge of their political and social context, but also understanding of local realities to help others use discretion in their Christian life and witness. Tengene describes the care which leaders exercised as persecution intensified and the church took its ministry underground:

We were witnessing on a one-to-one basis. We were nurturing disciples underground. We were baptizing secretly underground. We were carrying out all the different Christian rites: baptism, Holy Communion and dedicating children to the Lord. We did that underground. We did visitation work and counselling. We conducted secret leadership meetings. All these activities needed care ...because if we were caught there would be serious consequences.

Leaders wanted to learn as much as possible about what was happening around them. During leadership meetings and other church gatherings, scouts were sometimes appointed to watch the street or

²⁷⁶ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 197; in Interview 18, Solomon describes how MKC leaders in the Derg era “changed the structure of the church several times to fit the situation,” amending its constitution to allow more flexibility in the size of local elders’ councils, changing the frequency of denominational gatherings and adding regional leadership councils as the church grew.

²⁷⁷ Interview 2.

ride their bicycles through the neighbourhood “just to see what is happening” and then report noteworthy information to leaders. Sympathetic informants within the Derg party sometimes shared intelligence about government plans with MKC leaders and informed them when they were under increased surveillance. In turn, leaders shared relevant knowledge with church members. Jazarah appreciates how senior leaders would “make the members of the church aware of what was coming. If they heard any rumours, they would tell them to be very careful, be very wise in how they conducted themselves.”²⁷⁸

Even as they gathered information, church leaders regularly needed to make decisions based on limited knowledge. Bekele emphasizes the importance of “discerning the whole situation, discerning individuals, discerning groups.” A cadre, for example, might come and say, “I want to serve the Lord,” but with “a hidden agenda.” When training believers to share their faith with those outside the church, leaders coached them to use certain questions to ascertain if their listeners were government party members. Because some party members were “Marxist” only for the sake of personal advancement rather than conviction, Mamo would readily share the gospel with individuals at work, but never with two nonbelievers together. In the latter situation “each one is afraid of the other” and later “to save themselves, they may report, ‘This is a dangerous person.’”²⁷⁹

For Selassie, it was important to help church members distinguish between essential and peripheral matters of faith. If someone asks, “Are you a Christian?” the answer should be a definite “Yes!” When it came to applying their faith, however – such as whether to comply with a government order to attend an indoctrination session on a Sunday morning – there was room for discernment. For Yacob, the wisdom of leaders like Kedir was expressed in their non-confrontational approach to relationships and avoidance of political affairs when possible.²⁸⁰

b. Protocols for church gatherings

Church leaders coached members to follow certain protocols to keep church activities from the attention of the authorities (particularly after the closure of MKC in 1982), including i) limiting public

²⁷⁸ Interviews 1, 3, 9, 13, 14, 17 and 19; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 60.

²⁷⁹ Interviews 20 and 22; Abera Ertiro, “History of the Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth,” 35.

²⁸⁰ Interviews 2 and 7.

interactions with each other, ii) carefully choosing meeting locations and times, iii) hiding the presence and purpose of meetings, and iv) using code language in certain situations.

i. Limiting public interactions

Because of restrictions on assembly – and to protect each other, MKC leaders limited interactions with each other and church members in public. They instructed members to avoid using traditional Christian greetings or carrying a Bible in public, and ensure that no more than two or three were seen together. Participants in church gatherings were coached to arrive and depart individually or in pairs, at two or three minute intervals, using different travel routes when possible. At times, two leaders on bicycles might make plans as they rode together.²⁸¹

ii. Carefully choosing meeting locations and times

Leaders chose meeting places and times carefully, ideally a home surrounded by friendly neighbours, one with two gates for entering and leaving the yard or where one could easily come and go without being noticed. Sometimes they met in a home on the outskirts of town, in servants' quarters, in a car, in a hotel, in the woods or at a regional hot springs resort. They routinely changed locations, especially when a site attracted attention from authorities. Before the closure of the church in 1982, leaders avoided scheduling meetings after 6:30 pm to show they had nothing to hide. After MKC was outlawed, meetings were normally held in the evening to accommodate work schedules and provide the cover of darkness.²⁸²

iii. Hiding the presence and purpose of meetings

MKC leaders and members used various strategies to hide the presence and purpose of meetings. Monthly worship services were timed to coincide with EOTC Sunday morning mass; MKC members dressed like Orthodox believers and mingled with them on the street. Birthdays, holiday celebrations and

²⁸¹ Interviews 2, 3, 9, 10, 17, 18, 19 and 20; Alemu Checole, "Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa," 234; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 203-204, 207; Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 263; Mamo notes with a smile that women could sometimes get away with carrying a Bible, because "Nobody checks their purses."

²⁸² Interviews 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 19, 20 and 21; Alemu Checole, "Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa," 233; Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 41-45; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 196-197; Selassie notes that when the church was functioning openly, leaders wanted to avoid any impression that the church was involved in clandestine activities. They did not, for example, want anyone to be able to say, "Hey, these people...close their doors and put out the light and they do all sorts of things..."

funerals offered culturally accepted opportunities to gather in larger numbers. They often travelled on foot rather than taxi or horse cart to mitigate the threat of a driver reporting the address to authorities.²⁸³

Cell gatherings were planned to attract as little outside attention as possible. Aster Debossie describes how she and her husband (before his death in 1981) often hosted friends and new acquaintances in their home for meals and fellowship. Later, when she began hosting a cell group, neighbours and authorities did not seem to notice. Curtains and shutters on windows offered cover from outside onlookers; a heavy curtain separated the cell group's worship from activities in the rest of the house. Like many other cell groups, hers had food and cups ready, so that if there were unexpected visitors, members could hide the Bibles and appear to be having an Ethiopian coffee ceremony, a fellowship meal, or a party with friends. Participants naturally needed to keep their voices low when talking or singing at church gatherings: no clapping of hands or shouting hallelujah. At times of increased pressure, leaders in some communities would reduce the size of a cell groups to three or four people.²⁸⁴

iv. Codes

Leaders sometimes used metaphors and codes when arranging meetings or to alert church members to danger. When talking by phone, they might describe a baptism as a "burial service" or convey plans for communion by saying, "We should take glasses and bread to that house." "So and so is getting married at such and such a place" would indicate plans for a worship gathering. Particular homes, church committees and geographical regions were identified by acronyms, abbreviations or other codes. If leaders suspected that a government spy was present, they would use the term *Weran Dese*, the local name of a

²⁸³ Abera Ertiro, "Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth," 49-50; Alemu Checole, "Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa," 233-234; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 205, notes that the few North American Christian NGO workers remaining in Ethiopia did not attend cell gatherings, but sometimes went to holiday celebrations when it was less likely that they would endanger MKC members.

²⁸⁴ Interviews 3, 5, 7, 10, 18, 20 and 22; Alemu Checole, "Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa," 234; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 196-197, 203; Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Lehman, "Aster Debossie," 25; Kassa Agafari, "A Story of Perseverance," 17-19; Yacob says believers needed to change their worship style, even when praying privately: "We had to teach our members to go into bedrooms or into quiet places and lower their voices. Even if they wanted to sing, they should sing it very, very softly." He reports an incident after a baptism ceremony when a group gathered in a home for communion. The host's nephew reported them to the local kebele office. By the time authorities arrived, the group had scattered, but the kebele chairman – a Muslim – asked the home owner, "Why are you doing all this? Why are you teaching and making lots of noise when you are preaching and teaching and singing? Why do you shout?" The host replied, "Why don't you prevent your loud prayer shout in the middle of the night, at four in the morning and disturbing the sleep for people? We haven't done anything worse."

Kifle describes the need to command demons to be silent when involved in deliverance ministry: "When we had new believers, sometimes we had to exorcise demons. We had to rebuke demons and demons would cry out. We would order them to be quiet in the name of Jesus: 'Be silent,' because if neighbours heard this, they would come."

cattle disease. If a new believer had been well-grounded in Christian faith, leaders might describe him or her as *Ketebat* (vaccinated) to indicate their dependability as a disciple of Jesus.²⁸⁵

c. Limiting the spread of information about the church

Leaders safeguarded knowledge about cell group participants, meeting places and leaders to protect them. Discretion and confidentiality were high priorities. When Yakuta's husband Kelifa was arrested at the time MKC was closed, many evangelical believers stopped by her house to offer their support; government agents were mixed in, seeking information about the family's connections. When asked who would provide for her needs, Yakuta simply answered, "My Father is caring for me."²⁸⁶

Only a few leaders knew the extent of the MKC cell structure. They withheld that information from others so they could honestly plead ignorance if questioned by the authorities. Cell participants knew only about their own house fellowship, not other groups. Within each group there was significant personal sharing, but participants were committed to keep what they heard strictly confidential. When cell leaders met, they might share concerns or testimonies from their group with each other, with the understanding that it would go no further. Bekele says that a miracle in one group would not be reported to any others "because people may take that information to other people." Even if they were well-intentioned, testifying that "God has done this," there was risk of word spreading to government informants. Leaders refrained from mentioning names of other church members when at a cell meeting or on a pastoral visit. Bekele says, "When you read from the Scripture, you always stick to the Scripture. If you want to say anything [about] practical examples you need to be careful about it that you don't mention somebody's name."

Cell leaders related to a supervising leader, but had little knowledge of others in MKC leadership. According to Melaku, authorities tried to find out, "Who is really behind this? Who is organizing it? Where do you meet? Who are the people giving you shelter?" Because of that, "the challenge was to keep everything secret so that it would not be found out by the cadres." He says, "During the persecution you don't know even who is your leader," explaining that in the cell group "we just see somebody leading the

²⁸⁵ Interviews 1, 3 and 5; Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Kassa Agafari, "A Story of Perseverance," 17-19; Tibebe Eshete, *The Evangelical Movement in Ethiopia*, 262.

²⁸⁶ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 23; in Interview 12 Nyala says that a leader needs to "be a man who keeps secrets. He shouldn't disclose everything, because during the Derg times especially, you have to be careful how you operate, how you work things, where you meet. He has to be very, very secretive, so that the outside people would not know what is being done inside." In Interview 18, Solomon likewise identifies the ability to keep secrets as an essential quality for leaders in times of persecution: "If you are tempted to talk about it, then you spoil it, you know."

Bible study, and we are not even sure if he is the leader.” Because of his history with MKC prior to its closure, Bekele knew some senior leaders, but “did not have much connection with these people” in the underground era, “because they were supposed to be protected.” It was important to restrain one’s curiosity, Bekele adds: “We were not supposed to ask, ‘Who is the chairperson of MKC?’ or ‘Who is the general secretary for MKC?’” Leaders instead focussed on those with whom they had face-to-face relationships and responsibilities.²⁸⁷

d. Contextualizing appearance and presentation of personal identity

In some settings, MKC leaders adapted the way they presented themselves in order to remove barriers to effective ministry or avoid the attention of the authorities. When possible, they assigned ministry responsibilities to a leader who could easily blend in to a particular environment. When Kedir was doing evangelism and church planting in a predominantly EOTC region, he used his Orthodox cultural name Hail Meskel rather than Kedir, a Muslim name. When the Evangelism Committee needed someone to serve in the Awash Valley region, they intentionally chose a man who physically resembled the people of the area. As a merchant, the treasurer for the church in Addis Ababa was able to count money and deposit it into the bank without raising suspicions because onlookers assumed he was handling his own business.

Zere altered the age on his identification card so that he could participate in church activities at a time when those younger than thirty years were prohibited from doing so. Evangelist Kedir sometimes wore the signature clothing of a sheep trader, with overcoat, cape, hat and stick, making it easier to travel incognito; others then referred to him as “the shepherd” or “sheep trader.” Women sometimes changed the way they wore their headgear so they would be less easily recognized on the street.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷ Interviews 3, 11, 12, 17 and 22; Kassa Agafari, “A Story of Perseverance,” 17-19; Lehman, “Aster Debossie,” 24; Berihun says that, as much as possible, leaders kept sensitive information in their heads rather than writing it down. Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 196-202, mentions that when representatives from each of MKC’s fourteen churches gathered for a General Council in February 1983 they did not discuss plans with their wives. He also notes that while MKC leaders did their utmost to keep vital information from authorities, they recognized that their success ultimately depended on God. When Kedir was asked whether he was afraid that his records (as general coordinator for MKC and evangelist in Nazareth) might fall into authorities’ hands, he replied, “You have to trust the Lord; there is no other way.” Admitting that it would have been simple for the security people to investigate his activities, he emphasized that, “no one was allowed by the Lord to contact me. It was the protection of the Lord, and we thank him for it. It was not safe to serve the Lord at that time unless you trusting him fully.”

²⁸⁸ Interviews 10, 12 and 13; Abera Ertiro, “Meserete Kristos Church at Nazareth,” 40; Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 233; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 202-203.

7. Astute relations with authorities

Aware of shifting dynamics in their political and cultural milieu, MKC leaders understood the importance of using wisdom and creativity in their relationships with the authorities, a) practicing transparency while avoiding political comments, and b) cooperating when possible. At various times, they c) used ingenuity to evade authorities, or d) freely presenting themselves when sought by the authorities.

a. Selective transparency about ministry while avoiding political comments

Early in the Derg era, when the church was able to function legally, MKC leaders tried to assure authorities that the church was not a political threat and had nothing to hide. When government agents began to infiltrate Addis Ababa MKC worship events, “Church leaders were careful to do everything openly and refrained from criticizing the government.” Tewodros remembers the Wonji MKC elders council clarifying that even in cell groups, “We should be very careful not to talk about politics or other issues,” but “just concentrate on Bible teaching and prayer and so on.” According to Selassie, leaders did not want authorities to see them as “political agitators” and so “needed to be very careful” about what they said in public. Even so, some found it challenging to remain publicly silent about government injustice. Upset by what was happening around him – the suffering, beatings and killing – Kelile says: “Sometimes I even thought of standing in some public square and saying, ‘This is not right. This is wrong. You should stop doing this,’ but the Holy Spirit sort of kept me quiet...I was really tempted to shout and oppose what they were doing.”²⁸⁹

At times, MKC leaders proactively invited authorities to send a representative to their events. When planning an overnight Easter service in Addis Ababa, they informed the kebele community organization, asking them to send someone to come, sit and watch. Selassie says: “I can even picture the way the guy stood with his gun, right there in the church and at the same time was hearing the gospel the whole night. We did everything. We would worship. We would have the Word and a message and then testimonies after testimonies, feet washing, communion, everything, the works! So, you see, we wanted to

²⁸⁹ Interviews 2, 4 and 6; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 170-171, 178-179. MKC’s message – while “non-political” – was perceived as politically threatening. Hege notes that, “Evangelists and pastors focused their preaching on the uniqueness of Jesus, the power of the Holy Spirit as greater than any other forces, and the assurance of God’s presence in difficult times. They did not refer to the political situation; but the people understood.” The incident (discussed in Section C.2.c.i “Taking responsibility for their actions”) in which evangelist Tadesse Negewo contrasted the relative greatness of Jesus Christ and the Word of God with Mengistu Haile Mariam illustrates the sensitivity of the Derg government toward perceived slights.

be up front.” Kelile remembers the challenge of planning a conference at Nazareth Bible Academy at a time when the Derg had outlawed any assembly of more than three people without government permission. Anticipating more than a thousand participants from across the country, it was his responsibility to secure the authorities’ support for the event. He says, “God gave me him the wisdom how to go about this. I did not ask for permission to have this meeting on the compound. I said, ‘We want security. We want protection from the government for this meeting.’ So they sent soldiers to stand at that gate and keep peace and security. I didn’t say, ‘We want to have permission.’ I said, ‘We want your protection.’”²⁹⁰

b. Cooperating with the authorities when possible

As discussed above, church leaders encouraged members to cooperate with government authorities when possible, without compromising their faith. This required discernment and adaptability. When kebele indoctrination sessions were planned to interfere with Sunday morning worship, MKC members attended them and rescheduled worship services to the afternoon. Hakim recalls challenging some believers to change their charismatic worship style out of sensitivity to community concerns:

You make changes. If they say, "You are screaming when you worship," we recommended, "Worship quietly." Some Pentecostal leaders said, "This is stifling the Spirit..." So we had to make those changes and convince others...of course, Paul himself says, "If strangers come, wouldn't they think you are crazy when you shout and create a commotion?"

So we made those kinds of changes...as long as they did not affect our faith and principles. And we wanted to teach that, too.²⁹¹

c. Evading authorities

At times, MKC leaders found creative ways to evade government agents. Interviewees describe strategies used to lose government informants on their trail, how they avoided checkpoints by blending in with local people, alleviated suspicion when travelling by describing their occupation as “selling seeds” or “selling sheep,” and also times when they hid for a period of time. Lema remembers that three days after the church was closed, revolutionary guards came to his neighbourhood. He recounts the conversation:

²⁹⁰ Interviews 2 and 4.

²⁹¹ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 34-37; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 171; Interviews 2 and 16; Hakim refers to 1 Corinthians 14:23. In Interview 14 Jazarah similarly reflects on the need to discern when to accommodate and when to challenge authorities, giving the example of the Nazareth church refusing to allow the use of its facilities for a government literacy program, but offering to build rooms on kebele property for that purpose. She says, “That was, I think, wisdom. I think we were using wisdom, not to antagonize them, but to agree as far as we could, to go along with the good things that they were doing.”

“At the road, they asked me, ‘Do you know Lema’s house?’”

“Oh yes.”

“Where is it?”

“Across the road.”

“Is he there?”

“Maybe. Why don't you check?”

Lema says, “They went home. I went to Wonji Shoa and I hid for three months.”²⁹²

d. Presenting themselves when sought by the authorities

Although MKC leaders sometimes dodged the authorities, at other times they presented themselves to those looking for them. After successfully avoiding arrest at Nazareth Bible Academy, director Negash Kebede consulted with church leaders and others in Addis Ababa. Some suggested that he escape to Sudan, Kenya or Djibouti, but he was concerned that the government and media would report he had run away, using his actions for their propaganda. He says, “I didn't want to put the church in such risk. So I stayed.” Ten days after the initial attempt to arrest him, he visited a police station, and asked whether they were looking for him. They were. An official spoke roughly to him: “So you have been trying to hide from us. You think you can get away and escape?” Negash answered, “Am I acting like someone trying to

²⁹² Interviews 3, 5, 13, 14, 15 and 17; Lema observes: “I don't know how God was protecting us. When I think of that: how did I answer that question in such a way?” He gives other examples of “God’s provision and protection,” enabling him to evade the authorities. On a ministry trip to Bahir Dar neither he nor Tadesse had a valid identification card. When their vehicle needed to stop at a government check point, they prayed, “God, what are we going to do? These people are watching us.” Lema says, “All of a sudden, the driver came to us: ‘You two guys: move away. Go with these people,’” motioning to a group of local people. Blending in with the group, the two leaders bypassed the checkpoint with them. Describing another time, when he and a ministry companion were carrying Bibles – and a driver directed them to cross a regional border with local people – Lema marvels at “how God was working with us: “God, these guys don't know about you, but how do you use him in order to deliver us from such situations?”

Berihun recalls a time when he and Kedir flew to Jimma in western Ethiopia to give training to the local church. There was only one local taxi company, owned by “a secret agent of the communists,” whom Kedir knew well. Because it would have been burdensome to walk from the airport to downtown Jimma, they took a taxi to a certain spot. As they got out of the car, Kedir recognized the owner of the taxi company approaching them, and was certain that the man wanted to know why they were in town. The two MKC leaders found a place to order soft drinks and began to drink. When the agent passed them, they hired a buggy and travelled in a different direction.

Semer recalls a meeting of evangelists at his home. Outside, two armed officers were watching the house, seeking to catch and arrest Kedir. Upon learning this, Kedir slipped out of the house, got on his bicycle and rode past one of the guards, who did not notice him. When Kedir was one or two hundred feet away, the guard realized that he had escaped and began to pursue him. Kedir outpaced him and reached his own house without being caught.

escape by coming here and turning myself in?” The official did not know how to reply. Negash was taken into custody.²⁹³

8. Receptivity and obedience to the voice of God

Although leadership in the Meserete Kristos Church was marked by various expressions of external openness – including broad-based study, attentiveness to political, cultural and ideological context, willingness to receive feedback, ministry innovation and adaptive strategies for engaging with the authorities – it was ultimately focused on a desire to rely on God’s guidance rather than leaders’ own wisdom. Spiritual disciplines of worship, prayer and Bible study nurtured alertness to the voice of God and awareness of his presence, activity and direction for the church. Bekele remembers praying, “God, speak to us. Tell us what the next step is. How do we go about it? Where do we go?” He adds, “The Holy Spirit used to speak many things.”²⁹⁴ Leaders testify that the Holy Spirit gave them: a) encouragement and spiritual sustenance, b) words of knowledge, c) discernment, d) practical guidance, e) insight into security threats, and f) challenging assignments that tested their obedience to God.

a. Encouragement and spiritual sustenance

Manifestations of God’s presence and power brought great encouragement to the church and its leaders. Alemu says, “I was able to observe that God was really good at all times. Especially during times of persecution I felt his presence.” Despite opposition, he remembers, “God was really working miraculous things among us.”²⁹⁵ Recalling a season in which many students came to faith in Christ, Lema describes a

²⁹³ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 25-27, 179-180, 184; Interviews 7, 11, 16 and 21; other leaders who surrendered to the authorities include:

1. Ijigu Woldegebriel who left his home area to avoid service as a military guard. When authorities arrested his father, insisting they would not release him until Ijigu returned, he turned himself in, was imprisoned, had his identity card confiscated and lost the right to reside in his home kebele.
2. When MKC was closed, officials visited the house of Dr. Tesfatsion Delellew. His family said he was away on a trip, but authorities posted armed guards at his house, ready to arrest him on return. When he learned this, he contacted the Ministry of National Security and offered to appear for an interview. Over three hours of interrogation, Tesfa was relaxed, but matched his interrogator’s forceful approach. The officer could not find a reason to arrest him, but told him “to go home, do his job, and not be angry.”
3. When Yacob was arrested because of public statements that Tadesse had made in Yacob’s church in Wonji (discussed in Section C.2.c.i “Taking responsibility for their actions”), Tadesse presented himself to authorities in Wonji so that Yacob would be freed.

²⁹⁴ Interview 22.

²⁹⁵ Interview 10; Three sources describe miraculous healings of women who had been severely beaten, including a young woman from Nazareth whose ribs were broken and was semi-paralyzed from a beating in jail (Interview 6), and a woman with a broken back (Interview 21). Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 179, gives an account of the healing of Genet Lulseged Kumsa, a Mekane Yesus Church member who was unable to walk – and had excruciating pain – because the nerves of her feet had been damaged in a beating: “At an MKC conference before the church was

common occurrence: “God surprised us. We baptized people. When people came out from the water, all of a sudden, they were baptized in the Holy Ghost...the baptism of the Holy Spirit encouraged them in their spiritual life...they stuck to their faith. Those incidents inspired us: how God is working in such a way.”²⁹⁶

Tengene recounts a time when he was weighed down by political and social pressures from government and the community, and economic hardship because the Addis Ababa church did not have the financial capacity to pay full-time workers. After a day of walking a long distance, he was returning home on foot, exhausted and hungry. He heard the owner of a photo studio calling out to him. He says:

I thought I was going to get some food. I went to him. But he called me because there was a man who was possessed by a demon. He wanted me to pray for that guy! I was really exhausted, but God did a miracle for me. When I stretched out my hand, the demon-possessed man fell on the ground and he was freed...that demon-possessed man was filled with the Holy Spirit. When I came out of that shop, the feeling of hunger left me. I went home. It was a long distance away, but I went singing and rejoicing in the Lord.²⁹⁷

b. Words of knowledge

The Holy Spirit gave words of knowledge to some MKC leaders, leading to miraculous healings and putting the glory of God on display. On one occasion, an atheist attended a worship service in Addis Ababa with twenty of his friends. His plan to disturb the gathering was interrupted when the speaker Daniel Mekonnen announced, “The Lord wants to heal a young man in the audience with a painful leg.” The

closed, evangelist Daniel Mekonnen told the people to put a hand on the spot of any ailment they had while he prayed for them. Genet fell down, convulsing and shaking. After he finished praying, Daniel said, ‘The lady with the injured feet is healed.’ Genet went to the front to testify that an electrical power had gone through her and that all her pain was gone.”

²⁹⁶ Interview 17; In Interview 1 Dawit says that in addition to teaching new believers, leaders would also “pray for them to be filled with the Holy Spirit.” He remembers that when “the Holy Spirit just fell on the people,” he sometimes wondered, “How is that?” Even so, “God, the Almighty, just poured out his Holy Spirit. Then, after that, everybody became bold and took initiative just to serve God.”

²⁹⁷ Interview 19; Tengene adds, “During those times it was the grace of God that strengthened me. We used to pray a lot. And the Lord was certainly with us. This is how we were able to pass through those days.” In Interview 16 Hakim describes the unexpected arrival of a New Testament and two other Christian books in a care package from his wife while he was in prison. Neither know how these books ended up in the bag he received or how they could have made it through the prison security system. His wife says, “I didn't put it there. I don't know if our daughter was playing with something and just stuck something in. I have no idea how it got there.” Although Hakim was initially afraid the literature would be discovered by prison guards, he began circulating it among other inmates, who were encouraged by it. In Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*, Almaz describes how she had travelled from Eritrea to Addis Ababa in search of MKC, only to find the church closed. She remembers praying: “Oh Lord, I gave up the world to follow you. I gave up my family and my friends. I came here to worship and now the church is closed. I have no place to go. I sat in my home and wept. And then I prayed again and the Lord told me, ‘The house built with hands is closed, but the real church is not. The Holy Temple is the Body of Christ. It's the body of believers.’”

In Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 173-174, Alemayehu Assefa recalls his conversations with God as persecution increased, asking: “God, is it really this hard to follow you? Have our forefathers had this kind of problem? God, shall I leave you? But where would I go? It's not my wish to leave you, but the situation is pressing.” He testifies that God gave him peace by telling him, “You can endure this and come through it to a better time. Just be patient.”

atheist had been experiencing pain in his leg, so aggravating that he had been unable to sleep at night.

Astonished to hear his condition described, he went forward, received healing and came to faith in Jesus.²⁹⁸

c. Discernment

Some MKC leaders were particularly known and appreciated for their desire to rely on the direction of the Holy Spirit rather than their own wisdom. Nyala remembers that “Kedir was always led by the Holy Spirit. One time a brother who was working for an NGO in Ethiopia felt the call of God and came to ask counsel from Kedir. ‘I feel like I have to leave my job and become an evangelist, a full-time minister.’ Kedir told him, ‘You are in a rush. Stay where you are for a while, until you really find out for sure that is the call from God.’” The man was unhappy that he had not received an unqualified affirmation of call. When he complained to someone, that person said, “You have been told to stay in your workplace. Stay. That’s what God’s says.” Later, the man who received Kedir’s counsel said, “Brother Kedir always listens to the Spirit before speaking.” He ended up continuing his work with the NGO for a number of years before becoming a full-time evangelist.²⁹⁹

d. Practical guidance

Although evident from testimonies and reflections already discussed in this chapter, it is worth noting that MKC leaders experienced guidance from the Holy Spirit for practical decisions in their lives. While serving at Nazareth Bible Academy, Solomon sought God’s direction every year – especially during Christmastime – about whether he should continue in his role there. He says, “Toward the sixth year, when I prayed, I understood that next year I would not be at the Bible Academy. It was very clear for me...that I was not going to be there.” Confident that God wanted him to move to Addis Ababa, he shared his plans with others who asked, “What are you going to do? Where are you going to live?” Solomon replied, “I am not sure, but I am very sure that I am not here next year.” One friend said, “Solomon, this is something stupid. What are you thinking?” Solomon admitted, “Yes, it is stupid, but I am very sure.” After submitting his resignation, a friend from Addis Ababa suggested, “Why do we not apply for a plot of land in Addis so that we can build a house?” Solomon agreed. They were granted land. He built a house, and was hired by a government-run coffee plantation corporation. He and his family moved to the capital city. A couple of

²⁹⁸ Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 170.

²⁹⁹ Interview 12.

months later, the government confiscated the Bible Academy. Amazed by the timing, some asked, “Does Solomon have some relatives among the top officials of the Derg?”³⁰⁰

e. Insight into security threats

MKC leaders describe times when the Holy Spirit gave supernatural insight about threats to believers’ safety. Lema received a vision while preparing to teach new believers. When he asked God about it, he says, “A small voice came to me, ‘Today you are not teaching this lesson. Watch out. Dismiss the program.’ I tried to clear my eyes, but I still saw that vision.” When Lema entered the house where he was to teach he understood that one person present was “in charge of the security guards for the Derg.” He dismissed the group, saying they would reconvene another time. Two years later he met the man who had been revealed to be a government agent. Lema says, “He saluted me. I saluted him.” When Lema asked, “Do you know me?” the man replied, “You were teaching a certain lesson in certain areas. You told us you would invite us another time, but you didn’t do that. Let me tell you. I am a security guard from the government and I was spying on you, how you conduct your program. But that day, the Lord talked to my heart, how God is protecting you in such conditions. Now, I am a believer.” Lema remarks that such experiences help one to realize, “I am not alone. God is working with me. God is with me.”³⁰¹

f. Challenging assignments

Obedience to the Holy Spirit could, of course, involve great personal risk. Gemechu describes an incident in which his co-elder in Wonji Gerfersa, Teketel Chakiso, had a vision in which God gave him an assignment to deliver a message to Tilahun Tute, chairperson of the communist party’s Supervisory Committee. He told his wife about the vision, hoping she would dissuade him. “Go and tell him,” she said. Shaking with fear, he went to Gemechu and confided, “I have a message for Tilahun.”

“So, why don’t you go and tell him?” Gemechu asked.

“I fear him! You know the power, the authority that he has.”

Gemechu responded, “Whom do you fear: the One who sent you or the one who is just mortal?”

Which one do you fear?”

“Pray for me,” Teketel asked.

³⁰⁰ Interview 18.

³⁰¹ Interview 17.

With the church praying for him and Tilahun, Teketel approached the high-ranking official's house that evening. Trembling, he knocked on the door. "Please come in," Tilahun welcomed him. "Why did you come?"

"God has sent me."

"What? 'God has sent me'?"

Tilahun called his wife and children. Together they sat and listened while Teketel said it was time to be reconciled with God. If they responded in faith, God would bless them and the next generation. If not, there would be four consequences, which Teketel listed. To his immense relief, Tilahun and his family responded by kneeling down, weeping, to pray. A former Christian, Tilahun repented of having abandoned his faith and sinning against his family. Together, they received Jesus as their Saviour. Tilahun testifies, "I held the highest authorized position and was a popular person in the Wonji sugar state. I had good relationship with the top party leaders. Humanly speaking I had everything on earth at the time. But I did not have peace and rest. Because of this I drank too much to calm my sick soul." Gemechu adds: "Tilahun and other members of his family were physically ill, almost daily needing to visit the hospital. Wanting a change in his condition, he gave up drinking and 'prayed that God [would] send one of his servants' to him. 'If you do this, God, I will know that your mercy is still upon me and your everlasting love is with me.'"

Teketel went home praising God. Eager to grow as a disciple of Jesus, Tilahun went on to become a pastor.³⁰² For Teketel, external openness to God and to the counsel of others propelled him into action that could have cost him his life. Although stretching him far beyond his desire for safety and comfort, his faith enabled him to be part of a miracle.

E. Commitment: Transformational decisions

Ethiopian socialism created a milieu in which there was little room for ambiguity about Christian leaders' commitment to Jesus Christ and their ministries. Persecution forced a decision. Would leaders fully embrace the purpose, integrity, love and learning to which God called them or shrink back, comfort-centered, externally driven, self-focused and externally closed?

In interviews and other source material, Meserete Kristos Church leaders offer significant evidence of authentic transformational leadership, which according to Quinn entails a willingness to "Go

³⁰² Gemechu Gebre Telila, "Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa," 63-64; supplemented by interview.

forth and die.” Gemechu notes that when MKC members assess the impact of Derg opposition on the church, they almost always mention “deepening commitment within the church.” The transformational results of this dedication are evident throughout this chapter. Leaders overwhelmingly see this commitment as essential for ministry amid persecution, a great blessing in their own lives and in the church. Berihun recognizes that “experiencing prison life” helped him “grow as a leader and to face the challenges during the communist regime.” Kassa Agafari notes that, “The church grows through challenges and without challenges there won’t be any growth.” Interviewees express appreciation for colleagues who “were ready to sacrifice their time and their energy and their life and their money” to “strengthen the body of Christ.”³⁰³

Ultimately, the commitment of MKC leaders was grounded in their relationship with God and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Reflecting on his study of MKC experience, Gemechu highlights “a profound reliance upon the reality and efficacy of the Spirit’s presence and activity. Repeatedly, believers recall that the experience of persecution forced them to seek the power of the Holy Spirit.” Fikru Zeleke asserts that faithful leadership could not happen “by the efforts of flesh and blood,” and testifies that “The grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit exceed all other things.” Berihun comments that “Commitment is always a challenge,” and requires spiritual power available to every believer. He points out that the first disciples of Jesus shared life with him, “learning theology for three and a half years.” Travelling with him, “they knew the Lord very well, better than any one of us. And yet, after the Lord had risen, he told them strictly to wait in Jerusalem to be empowered from on high.” Berihun adds, “For ministry we need the fullness of the Holy Spirit.”³⁰⁴

³⁰³ Hostetler, *Against Great Odds*; Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 80; Robert E. Quinn, *Change the World: How Ordinary People can Accomplish Extraordinary Results* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 179; Interviews 3 and 12. Appreciation for commitment, faithfulness and perseverance is reflected in every interview. Berihun identifies the sacrificial ministry of the Derg years as *servant leadership*. Referencing the teaching of Jesus, he says:

The one who wants to serve must be a servant in a real sense...It demands self-denial and sacrifice. John 12:23-26: Unless...a kernel of corn falls to the ground, and dies, it remains by itself; it doesn't make any fruit. But if it falls and dies, then it makes a lot of fruit. Servant leadership is crucial for church growth. Where there is servant leadership the church grows and impacts its community and the world. During the persecution, God taught us how to become servant leaders. As someone said, "Receive as a child and live like a king." A leader has to be humble and faithful. God taught us to be humble.

³⁰⁴ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 67; Hege, *Beyond our Prayers*, 200; Interview 3; Girma Haile, “Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Church,” 27-28, identifies “the secret” of MKC’s growth as “nothing but the work of the Holy Spirit,” who “changed and disciplined the believers and their lifestyle” to be a witness to Jesus and show the love of God, and who enabled many outside the church to be saved. In Interview 18 Solomon says that persecution, “made me grow near to God in Christ, and also depend on the Holy Spirit.” In Interview 20 Mamo notes that, “The Holy Spirit was motivating me to continue.” In Interview 14 Jazarah says, “One thing that really helped me to be strong in the faith was the grace of God, and his power. I felt the Holy Spirit’s guidance and nudging...it’s the grace of God that really helped me not to give in.”

Some leaders remember great satisfaction and joy amid the sacrificial challenges of ministry at that time. Berihun rejoices that, “The persecution really made me to be closer with God, to walk with God daily...relying on God and trusting him daily. Really, I have been made to be with God...Many really sacrificed themselves for the work of the Lord and the ministry that God entrusted to them, for the church. God is the one who really dealt with my life, to trust him daily, simply with a child-like faith.”

Gemechu observes that MKC members not only endured hardship, they thrived because of persecution. He quotes Teketel Chakiso who enthusiastically declares, “Persecution has been a blessing to our church.” Seeing evidence of God’s work in the lives of others also provided significant encouragement. Kifle says that when believers whom he had nurtured were “strong and kept in the faith that was like a reward for me. It was a joy for me to see that. That made me...even more committed; even to be sacrificed for the sake of the gospel.”³⁰⁵

Although commitment was valued as essential among MKC leaders, Bekele recognizes that it could have a shadow side: when dedication to ministry caused leaders to neglect their families:

Commitment is very important. That's what we have learned from our leaders in the church. We used to have committed leaders. Yet, you know, in some ways, sometimes, that was not really good, because some leaders forgot their families. They didn't have time with their families. They didn't have time with their children. They didn't have time with their wife.

So their family was really affected while they were...serving the Lord...I think we need to serve our family first. We need to give time to our family...because that is the small church there. The bigger church comes out of that. So I think leaders have to care for their families very well. In our culture, if somebody is a full-time minister, they will forget everything, and they say, "I am serving the Lord, and I go for the Lord here, there," but his wife might want him to be with her. The children might want him to be with them. So leaders need to first care about their families, and then about others. I think the accountability will be there. God will ask for your family.³⁰⁶

For Solomon, obedience to Christ required him to relinquish his academic goals during the years of the Derg. Sometimes external obstacles prevented him from entering a doctoral program; other times, he sensed internally that the Lord was withholding permission for him to continue his studies. He recalls a

³⁰⁵ Gemechu Gebre Telila, “Meserete Kristos Church at Wonji Gefersa,” 72; Interviews 3 and 5; in Interview 10 Abebech expresses her satisfaction in seeing new believers in whose lives she invested sacrificially become “very competent, very capable leaders” in the church. Interviews 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 17 also include reflection on leaders’ satisfaction in fruitful ministry, despite the personal cost.

³⁰⁶ Interview 22; Bekele adds that some well-respected full-time ministers “lost their families,” and have children who “are not in the church now.” Bekele reports that they say, “What did my Dad do for me? He was running here and there. He didn't give me time. He was not talking to me. He was always talking about Jesus.” Sadly, Bekele observes, “There are families who have lost their children; even their marriage, their relationship with their wife.” The temptation to neglect family in pursuit of church ministry is probably greater for men in Ethiopian culture than for women. In Interview 14 Jazarah mentions that she resigned part way through her second two-year term as elder in order to care for two of her children who struggled with mental health challenges.

time after the closure of Nazareth Bible Academy, when he expressed his frustration about this to God. He says, “I was expecting big things to happen in my life.” University friends had finished their doctoral degrees. One day he asked God:

Am I your enemy? Why do you stand in my way – either on the outside or the inside? Sometimes you stand on the outside. Sometimes you stand in the inside.

Am I your enemy: when all these [others] achieve [academic goals], and you have given me the capacity? You have given me the intellectual capacity, but you have not allowed me to [get an advanced degree]...Shouldn't I have two or three Ph.D.'s by this time?

I prayed. I wept. I was weeping for two hours in front of God. “Why? Why do you keep me behind?” I thought of all my friends, even at school, who use to copy homework from me.

Within a day or two, a man from another church, whom Solomon had met once before, arrived with a message. Although Solomon had not discussed his frustration or prayer with anyone, his visitor said:

The Lord has sent me to you concerning your prayer. “If you want it, you can get two or three,” says the Lord. “But my grace will not be with you,” says the Lord. “You can go ahead. You will get it. You can get it, but my grace will not be with you.”

Solomon marvels that the messenger used the same phrase he had used in his prayer, saying:

It was so clear. And it was powerful. It didn't reach my head. It reached my whole being. And then, after the person left, I said, “Okay, if you are happy with the situation in which I am, okay Lord, I like that you are happy.” It was not from bitterness, but...I said, “If this makes you happy, keeping me behind, let it be so.” And then, I recalled all those friends who I compared myself with ...I said, “Thank you for doing this to this person. Thank you for doing this to this person. Thank you so much.” Then I asked him, “So, you be to me ten thousand Ph.D.'s.”³⁰⁷

Kassa Agafari vividly describes the despair of church members when MKC was outlawed, saying, “When the church was closed and the missionaries left, we felt like the Israelites when the ark was captured by the Philistines: ‘Ichabod—the glory has departed.’ We wondered if MKC would die.” Reflecting on the tremendous growth of the church amid the persecution, he says: “When the church was closed, only those who had ‘died to self’ came to us. They didn’t fear for their lives. They were like grains of wheat in the ground...Just as the early missionaries taught us about Jesus Christ, we too will be a missionary church, working for the glory of God throughout the earth.” Reflecting on the same theme, Alemu Checole writes: “What the Marxist government thought it had killed and buried in fact survived and multiplied through the resurrection power of our Lord. The event reminds us of the saying of Jesus in John 12:24: ‘I tell you the

³⁰⁷ Interview 18; even without a Ph.D. Solomon has made formidable intellectual contributions to the church in Ethiopia, not only serving MKC, but also giving leadership to a national interdenominational association of evangelical churches and shaping provisions for religious freedom in the post-Derg Ethiopian constitution.

truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”³⁰⁸

Men and women in the Meserete Kristos Church would undoubtedly agree that their commitment to leading with purpose, integrity, love and creativity was not only empowered by the Holy Spirit, its transformational impact was also borne of that same resurrection power.

F. Summary of analysis

Amid the upheaval, uncertainty and danger of the Ethiopian revolution, many Meserete Kristos Church leaders chose to pursue the mission of Jesus Christ, willing to suffer for the sake of the kingdom of God rather than acquiesce to political, social and cultural forces intent on eliminating evangelical Christianity from the country. Robert Quinn argues people are normally comfort-centered, externally driven, self-focused and externally closed. In the face of crisis, however, a person may potentially make a decision that serves as a catalyst for “deep change.” One who unreservedly embraces a purpose greater than his or her survival may be propelled out of the habits and patterns of “slow death” into a highly effective “Fundamental State of Leadership.” Persecution from the Derg regime forced MKC leaders to clarify the priority of their devotion to Jesus and their engagement in his mission. Ready to die for the sake of the gospel, their leadership in this era was marked by 1) a highly effective pursuit of purpose, 2) compelling integrity under external pressure, 3) attractive love and 4) remarkable creativity.

1. Highly effective pursuit of purpose

Men and women active in MKC leadership refused to let their human desire for comfort distract them from pursuing five closely interconnected goals:

- a. Having been personally converted from self-defined ambition to God’s purposes and depending on God for comfort rather than seeking physical safety, material luxury or social security, research participants first of all sought **to be personally faithful to Jesus Christ**.
- b. **Passion for evangelism** is reflected not only in statements about its importance, but also in creative strategies for spreading the gospel, evangelical risk-taking in the face of persecution, missionary initiative, and confidence that evangelism is a participation in God’s work.
- c. Captivated by a vision for a church centered on Jesus Christ, biblically grounded, persistent in prayer, united, faithful, holy, and financially healthy, leaders worked **to strengthen the church** by

³⁰⁸ Showalter, “Like Grains of Wheat,” 22-23; Alemu Checole, “Mennonite Churches in Eastern Africa,” 236.

making literature available, restructuring it into cell groups, visiting members, discipling new believers, and modelling faithfulness in their own lives.

- d. **Multiplying and equipping leaders** through teaching events, training programs, mentor relationships, attentiveness to potential leaders, discernment in leadership assignments and a growing recognition of and reliance on the leadership gifts of women.
- e. **The expansion and growth of the kingdom of God and an elevation of the glory of God** above personal ego, inconvenience, hardship or suffering.

2. Compelling integrity under external pressure

MKC leaders sought to act according to their deepest internal commitments rather than yielding to the coercion of others:

- a. External **pressures** included socialist propaganda, ridicule, harassment, ostracism, threats, hostile mobs, false accusations, economic inducements, confiscation of property, discouragement from former Christians, surveillance, ministry restrictions, military conscription, beatings, arrests, imprisonment and rumours.
- b. Persecution commonly triggered **emotional reactions** in MKC leaders, including feelings of fear, anxiety, sadness, anger, hurt, betrayal, uncertainty, confusion, insecurity, loneliness, frustration, discouragement, being overwhelmed, and embarrassment.
- c. Personal integrity was intimately entwined with a **readiness to personally, publicly and unwaveringly identify with Jesus**.
- d. Aware of their human weakness, **they pursued the presence, provision, guidance and power of God through spiritual disciplines** of Bible study, prayer and fasting. Many credit the Holy Spirit for enabling them to act with courage in the face of external pressure.
- e. Persecution regularly **tested leaders' integrity and faith** as they wrestled with which, if any revolutionary slogans they could say in good conscience, the extent to which they could participate in Derg programs, when to defy Derg directives, how respond to attempts to shut down ministry, and how to navigate political minefields in the workplace.
- f. Participants identify the importance of **self-leadership**, recognizing that the effectiveness of their leadership depended on the integrity of their example.
- g. Leaders characterize persecution as **a crucible for spiritual formation and character development**, describing its impact on their relationship with God in highly positive terms.

3. Attractive love

MKC leaders wanted to actively demonstrate love in all relationships, putting the welfare of others ahead of their own, giving evidence that:

- a. This was grounded in an understanding that **humility and love** are essential for Christian leaders, and **result from the transforming work of the Holy Spirit**.
- b. **Team relationships were marked by love**, mutual acceptance, understanding, grace and unity as leaders worked together toward common purposes, faced stressful situations together, established

patterns of support and accountability, managed differences to produce growth, and experienced the joy of shared recreation.

- c. Leaders showed **love for the church** through advocacy for believers facing injustice, protecting others when possible, pastoral care, material assistance, support for prisoners and their families, conflict management and mediation, and music ministry.
- d. They were convinced that **the love of God extended to their non-believing neighbours**. This not only motivated their passion for evangelism, but also led them to seek the well-being of their communities and nation through prayer, practical help to the poor, visiting the sick and prisoners, friendships, acting justly, and participating in community events and projects.
- e. They were **committed to loving persecutors**. Some describe a challenging process of learning to do so. Viewing persecution in the context of spiritual warfare, leaders prayed for persecutors, empathized with them, tried to treat them fairly and kindly, sought to lead them to Christ, and celebrated when they turned to him in faith.

4. Remarkable creativity

The external openness of MKC leadership enabled a remarkable, fruitful creativity:

- a. Leaders highly valued **wisdom as a gift from God**, anchored in biblical knowledge but also formed by attentiveness to context and study of diverse fields of knowledge.
- b. They **wanted to understand** their changing political, cultural and social context.
- c. Their **enthusiasm for study** included the Bible, Marxist and Christian literature, and the experience of Christians in other communist settings.
- d. Their **willingness to receive feedback and correction** fueled personal growth.
- e. **Evidence of ministry innovation** can be seen in many areas, but the shift to a cell-based church structure was probably most transformational.
- f. Constantly alert to their surroundings, leaders tried to **protect church members and conceal their ministries** by gathering information, assessing risks and equipping others to use discretion, by creating protocols for church gatherings, by limiting the spread of information, and by contextualizing their presentation of personal identity.
- g. Leaders often showed **wisdom through astute relations with authorities**. At times they practiced selective transparency while avoiding political comments, cooperating when possible, ingeniously evaded authorities or freely presented themselves when sought by them.
- h. Ultimately, leaders' external openness was focused on **a desire to hear from God and respond in obedience**, resulting in spiritual sustenance, occasional words of knowledge, discernment, practical personal guidance, insight about security threats, and challenging assignments that further stretched their faith.

5. Commitment, results and a “Fundamental State of Leadership” empowered by the Holy Spirit

During Ethiopia's seventeen-year experiment with Marxism and the accompanying persecution, the Meserete Kristos Church grew from 800 to 34,000 baptized members, significantly expanded its

geographic reach, dramatically increased the number of people engaged in ministry, transitioned from being “a Sunday church to an everyday church,” became financially self-supporting, adopted a radically new ministry structure, and supported a contagious spiritual vitality among its members. The source material for this study testifies to leadership that was purpose-centered, internally driven, other focused and externally open. Research participants credit their commitment, leadership, and the transformational impact on the church to the faithfulness of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION

What can the global church – in contexts of persecution as well as in relative freedom and security – learn from the leadership experience of the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) that could strengthen its faithfulness and witness to Jesus Christ? Seeking to advance the pragmatic task of practical theology, this chapter assesses learning from the case study through the normative lens of biblical theology and the interpretive lens of Robert Quinn’s authentic transformational leadership theory, considers its relevance for the global church and identifies areas for further research.

A. Learning from MKC leaders: Biblical and theoretical perspectives

The church of Jesus Christ was born amid persecution. Like countless people in the Bible and throughout history, two hundred million followers of Jesus around the world face significant harassment, persecution, and/or the possibility of martyrdom because of their faith. Although it is biblically normative for disciples of Jesus to expect some degree of persecution because of their witness to him, many global Christians live comfortable, externally driven, self-focused, externally-closed lives. Despite growing popular and academic interest in the persecuted church, leadership in this context has received scant research attention.

During the Ethiopian socialist revolution of 1974-1991, men and women in the Meserete Kristos Church exercised authentic transformational leadership in the midst of substantial persecution. Already on the religious periphery in a setting where national identity had been closely tied to allegiance to the emperor and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, evangelical Christians were further marginalized as the state embraced Marxist-Leninist atheism. MKC was profoundly shaped by two historical streams – the Christian witness and leadership of the Mennonite mission together with an indigenous ecumenical Holy Spirit movement. While grounded in Ethiopian cultures, the church established new patterns of broadly shared leadership animated by the gospel of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Robert Quinn argues that people normally accommodate themselves to common transactional patterns of human functioning and relationship. Conditions of crisis, however, force men and women to make a critical decision: will they withdraw from the challenge at hand or fully commit to a purpose greater

than their own survival? The moral authority to lead, according to Quinn, is grounded in one's readiness to "go forth and die," which in turn galvanizes the commitment of others. With this kind of unreserved personal commitment, a person shifts from a comfort-centered, externally driven, self-focussed, internally closed psychological orientation and behaviour to the "Fundamental State of Leadership" in which one exercises transformational influence, functioning with increasing purpose, integrity, love and creativity.

As a historical case study of leadership in MKC amid the persecution of the Derg regime, this thesis project is *particularistic*, seeking a holistic view of a bounded phenomenon, *descriptive*, offering "thick" description of the case, and *heuristic*, opening a window into an experience that has received meagre research attention. Interviews with twenty-four men and women identified as leading well under the conditions of the Ethiopian revolution were framed using Quinn's authentic transformational leadership theory as a conceptual lens. Interview transcripts, supplemented by first-person written and oral testimony, served as primary source material for analysis.

Amid the turmoil, uncertainties and perils of the Derg era, many MKC leaders effectively pursued the mission of Jesus Christ, ready to suffer for the sake of the kingdom of God rather than yield to political, social and cultural forces intent on quashing the influence of evangelical Christianity. During Ethiopia's seventeen-year experiment with Marxism, MKC grew from 800 to 34,000 baptized members, significantly expanded its geographic reach, increased the number of people engaged in ministry, transitioned from being "a Sunday church to an everyday church," became financially self-supporting, adopted a radically new ministry structure, and supported a contagious spiritual vitality among its members. Persecution forced MKC leaders to clarify the priority of their devotion to Jesus and their engagement in his mission. Prepared to die for the sake of the gospel, their leadership in this era was marked by:

- 1) Highly effective pursuit of purpose, focused on personal faithfulness to Jesus Christ, passion for evangelism, strengthening the church, multiplying and equipping leaders, the expansion and growth of the kingdom of God and seeking the glory of God.
- 2) Compelling integrity under external pressures, closely entwined with a readiness to personally and publicly identify with Jesus, nurtured through spiritual disciplines, and commitment to lead by example. Persecution tested leaders' integrity and faith, functioning as a crucible for spiritual formation and character development.
- 3) Attractive love, dependent on the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, expressed in team relationships and work, support for others in the church, care for non-believing neighbours and love for persecutors.

- 4) Remarkable creativity, with leaders valuing wisdom as a gift from God, engaging in study, keen to understand their changing political, cultural and social context, ready to receive feedback and correction, innovating in ministry, alert to their surroundings, astute in relation to authorities, eager to hear from God through the Bible and the Holy Spirit.
- 5) Transformational commitment, empowered by the Holy Spirit, leading to miraculous results.

While honest about their own weaknesses and shortcomings, there is significant evidence that research participants collectively modelled good shepherding as faithful servant martyriological leaders during the Ethiopian revolution. Themes of persecution and leadership are integral to the overarching narrative of Scripture, to the experience, example and salvific work of Jesus Christ, and to the vocation of his disciples. Meserete Kristos Church leaders embraced a biblically grounded vocation:

- 1) Responding to the initiative of God, who suffers – particularly in Jesus Christ – in his ministry of reconciliation, they pursued the mission of the God with purpose, integrity, love and creativity, prioritizing their primary call as disciples.
- 2) Persecuted because of their allegiance and witness to Jesus – whose suffering and death is the wellspring of salvation – they saw the gospel transform lives, the kingdom of God growing by his grace.
- 3) They testify that God used persecution to produce Christ-like character in them and advance his agenda in the world. To give faithful leadership in the conditions of the Derg era required them to radically rely on God for vision, moral strength, love and wisdom.
- 4) The historic marginalization of evangelical Christians in Ethiopia and exposure to biblical teaching shaped leaders' understanding that some degree of persecution is normative for disciples of Jesus – although some describe a process of struggle to accept that God would allow them to suffer.
- 5) In the context of persecution, no one seeking personal comfort, driven by external pressure or self-focus would choose to be active in church leadership. As servants and under-shepherds of Jesus, MKC leaders were motivated by passion for God's agenda and glory, pursued the well-being of his people, depended on God for provision, protection and guidance, and reinforced his message through the integrity of their example.
- 6) As martyriological leaders, they prioritized witness to Jesus, seeking the salvation of others – including their persecutors, even when it entailed personal suffering.
- 7) Their leadership under persecution required unreserved commitment, courage and reliance on the Holy Spirit, whose power is revealed in human weakness. Research participants testify that when they failed, God invited them to repent, leading to experiences of forgiveness and restoration.

B. Relevance for the global church

The global church needs leaders who demonstrate transformational commitment and, empowered by the Holy Spirit, function with purpose, integrity, love and creativity under pressure, whether from persecution or other sources. The results of this qualitative research are not statistically generalizable, but

testify to God's work of shaping and using servant, martyriological shepherds in one network of evangelical churches under the persecution of a Marxist regime.

The Lausanne Occasional Paper, "The Persecuted Church," identifies the need for strong church leadership through the trials and victories of suffering, encouraging 1) capacity building within and for the persecuted Church; 2) networking and partnership between persecuted and non-persecuted, and between different parts of the persecuted Church; and 3) developing a theology of persecution, drawing on lessons learned from churches under persecution, especially with regard to missiology.¹ Reaffirming these recommendations, the 2009 *Bad Urach Statement* prioritizes:

- 1) Creating worldwide awareness of how segments of the church are functioning under varied restrictions;
- 2) Learning from churches suffering under repressive regimes how they remain steadfast in faith and grow despite restrictions;
- 3) Encouraging persecuted churches through prayer support and other practical forms of help;
- 4) Equipping local churches to give testimony to Jesus Christ in times of trouble; and
- 5) Preparing churches to face future adversity by affirming the oneness of the Body of Christ, cultivating a deeper measure of active global cooperation, and creating avenues of contact and communication directly or indirectly with churches suffering persecution.

Research into leadership has overwhelmingly focussed on relatively affluent, entrepreneurial contexts. Given the dearth of attention given to leadership in settings of persecution (as well as non-Western cultures), this thesis project seeks to contribute toward the Lausanne and Bad Urach Statement goals identified above. Although conditions of persecution, culture, economics and politics vary dramatically across the global church, the experience of leaders in the Meserete Kristos Church offers insight and encouragement for leaders in other settings. Some features of their testimony are, of course, more bound to their historical Ethiopian context than others. Concrete and specific, case studies invite readers to interpret the phenomenon under observation through other contextual lenses, such as their own experience or that of a particular reference population, extending learning by generalizing and applying knowledge beyond the original case.²

¹ Patrick Sookhdeo, *The Persecuted Church, Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 32* (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 2005). Other recommendations concern advocacy and legal issues, prayer, practical assistance.

² Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 29-32; John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 46-49.

Persecution may be driven by various ideological sources (such as radical Islam, communism, religious nationalism or secular humanism) and emerge from diverse societal loci (such as government, family, culture, religious authorities or corrupt individuals). The nature and intensity of suffering varies widely. Still, although strategies may differ according to context, the broad contours of purposeful, internally driven, loving, creative, transformational leadership described above – anchored in a biblically grounded vocation – are relevant for the church in every time and place. When the people of God face similar restrictions as MKC in the 1970s and 80s, some MKC strategies for evangelism, structuring the church, leadership development, navigating persecutors' demands or managing relations with authorities might also be quite appropriate and applicable. Those experiencing severe persecution – faced with their own decisions about call and commitment – may be encouraged by the testimony of MKC leadership to seek God's purpose, truth, love and creativity in pursuit of his mission in their own context.

What about the church in democratic societies which guarantee freedom of religion? Janet Epp Buckingham argues that although the modern secular state delivers many benefits, "Secularism has become a religion unto itself." Attempting to be blind to differences among citizens, in some senses the state "forces everyone to strip themselves of what forms their identity." She observes that restrictions on Christians in the secular West range from mild to severe, but "are usually couched in the language of 'tolerance.'" Despite constitutional and international agreements protecting religious freedom, Christians (among others) have been socially excluded or marginalized based on public expressions of their faith, often based on perceptions that their faith is controversial or to discourage views deemed out of step with cultural values. Although private religious practice is protected, in some cases the state has limited the public wearing of faith symbols, preaching, evangelism, Christian clubs on school campuses or the rights of conscientious objection for professionals who refuse to participate in abortion, euthanasia or solemnizing same-sex marriages.³

³ Janet Epp Buckingham, "The Modern Secular West: Making Room for God," in *Sorrow and Blood: Christian Mission in Contexts of Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom*, eds. William D. Taylor, Antonia van der Meer and Reg Reimer (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2012), 221-228. See also Lars Dahle, "Western Europe – Marginalization of Christians through Secularisation?" in *Freedom of Belief and Christian Mission*, ed. Hans Aage Gravaas et al., (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 382-394; Iain T. Benson, "The attack on Western religions by Western law: Re-framing pluralism, liberalism and diversity," *International Journal of Religious Freedom*, 6, no. 1/2 (2013): 111-125; Roger Trigg, "Religious freedom in a secular society," *International Journal of Religious Freedom*, 5, no. 1 (2012): 45-57.

Two Ethiopian research participants expressed concern for churches in Canada, the United States and Europe, that they would be faithful witnesses to Christ amid the persecution to which they are subject. Selassie emphasizes that “persecution is a given in the life of a Christian,” because when giving witness to Jesus Christ and the gospel, one creates a “difference between you and your neighbor” and “there is a potential for conflict there.” Recognizing an ongoing culture shift in North America, in which Christian faith is no longer as popular as it once was, he stresses the need for church leaders to ensure believers are well-grounded in their relationship with God, ready to face opposition, equipped with a solid biblical theology of persecution. The challenge, Selassie, observes, does not necessarily involve physical suffering, but is largely spiritual. Hakim likewise notes that Western churches are in a spiritual battle. “There is no church that does not get attacked,” he says. “This way or another, there is persecution.” Whereas the persecution of the Ethiopian church was physically visible, persecution can also be subtle, such as “materialism creeping into the church.” Leaders need to help followers of Jesus prevail in faith when they are under ideological attack, Hakim insists. A recent piece in *Christianity Today* offers additional perspective from persecuted church leaders on the marginalization of American Christians and the spiritual pressures leading to cultural compromise.⁴

Whatever the form or severity of persecution, believers may be tempted either to withdraw from giving witness to Christ in the public arena – or to fight against those who oppose them in a way that would betray the gospel or bring it into disrepute. Churches and leaders living and working in comparatively secure environments would do well to ask to what extent they have accommodated themselves to the “normal” conditions of life and leadership of a transactional world – primarily seeking comfort for themselves and their families, driven by external pressures and influences, focused on self and closed to learning that would require deep, Holy Spirit-led, change. Challenged by the witness of MKC leaders, one could adapt and supplement Robert Quinn’s questions for facilitating a move from a “normal state” into the

⁴ Interviews 2 and 16; K. A. Ellis, “Are US Christians Really ‘Persecuted’?” *Christianity Today*, 60, no. 7 (September 2016): 36. Ellis describes her reticence to use the word “persecution” to describe rising anti-Christian hostility in the United States, but highlights observations from persecuted Christian leaders in the Middle East. She cites an underground house church leader who says, “Persecution is easier to understand when it is physical: torture, death, imprisonment. ... American persecution is like an advanced stage of cancer; it eats away at you, yet you cannot feel it. This is the worst kind of persecution.” A Syrian believer laments: “It wasn’t only ISIS who laid waste to the church; our cultural compromises with the government and our divisions against each other brewed for a long time.”

Fundamental State of Leadership. Anchoring these questions in the larger framework of biblical faith, so that they are not self-defined but serve the purposes of God, in any situation one might ask:

- What result does God want to create? What part is he calling me to play in his agenda?
- What would my story be if I were living the values of Jesus?
- How do others feel about the situation? How might I convey the love of God as I relate to them?
- What are three (or four or five) strategies God might bless for pursuing his purposes in this situation?
- What price am I ready to pay for the sake of Jesus Christ and the gospel?

Leaders cannot, of course, guarantee transformational results based on their performance. Instead, leading by example, they invite others to trust Jesus, who when speaking about his own death and resurrection said, “Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”⁵ Grounded in a robust biblical theology of persecution, leaders may be spurred toward unreserved commitment to Jesus Christ, his church and kingdom, confident that their “labor in the Lord is not in vain.”⁶ In the midst of human frailty, failure, and suffering, the Holy Spirit enables purposeful, internally driven, loving, creative leadership that gives testimony to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

C. Areas for further research

The breadth and diversity of persecution experience and leadership in the global church begs for sustained, attentive study. This historical case study has been necessarily limited to 1) one small evangelical denomination, 2) over a certain time period, 3) and place, 4) using a particular theoretical model. How does faithful Christian leadership vary under different conditions of persecution? What are common features that transcend particular circumstances? Variables include:

1. Political, cultural, religious and economic context;
2. The societal locus of persecution: government, family, culture, religious authorities or corrupt individuals;
3. The ideological driver of persecution (such as radical Islam, communism, religious nationalism or secular humanism); and
4. The nature, intensity and severity of suffering.

⁵ John 12:24.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:58.

There is considerable need and opportunity for further research into leadership in persecuted churches around the world. As a theoretical lens, Robert Quinn's authentic transformational paradigm has proved to be fruitful, eliciting rich reflection from research participants about diverse aspects of leadership under persecution. What other theories might be helpful for this inquiry? Quinn's concept of the Fundamental State of Leadership focuses on the psychological orientation of one positioned to lead effectively. How do structural issues affect leadership under persecution? What philosophies of leadership are more or less functional in different contexts of persecution? How do assumptions about ecclesiology affect the ability of persecuted leaders to adapt to restrictions placed on them? What could be learned from the experience of persecuted leaders who are less successful in their efforts – whether for contextual or personal reasons? How do leaders who carry significant emotional or spiritual wounds from persecution – such as post-traumatic stress disorder – find healing and fresh empowering for ministry? How do leaders in secure, prosperous democracies navigate opposition to the gospel in post-Christendom contexts? What are common ways in which leaders adjust their behaviour in response to cultural or relational pressures, to avoid disapproval or other kinds of discomfort? How might increasing awareness of faithful leadership under persecution equip leaders and their churches to better live and to lead with purpose, integrity, love, and creativity, undergirded by radical commitment to Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God?

There is surely much to gain from a deeper understanding of the dynamics of leadership in times of persecution. Given the biblical expectation that persecution is normative for disciples of Jesus, and the continuing realities of global persecution, it is incumbent upon the church to learn as much as possible about how to nurture robust, faithful leadership under opposition.

APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW GUIDE

Leadership background

1. How did you come to be a leader in the Meserete Kristos Church?
2. In what ways did you give leadership during the years of the Derg?

Leading under persecution

3. How did the persecution of the church affect you?
4. Can you tell me about a time when you felt you were at your best as a leader?
5. What results did you want to create as a leader? What were you hoping to accomplish?
6. I imagine that persecution would put great pressure on you to compromise your faith and values. What kind of pressure did you experience? How did you battle temptation to compromise your faith?
7. How did you work as a team in those difficult circumstances?
8. How did you help others cope with the pressure of persecution? How did the needs of others challenge you as a leader?
9. How did you keep your heart open to people who were persecuting the church?
10. What changes did you need to make in your leadership as a result of the persecution? What helped you learn and grow as a leader during that time?
11. What do you appreciate about the leadership that others gave during the years of the Derg?
12. What leadership qualities do you think are especially important when the church is being persecuted?
13. What was your biggest challenge as a leader?

Persecution and faith

14. How did the persecution affect your relationship with God?
15. How did God encourage or strengthen you as a leader during the years of persecution?

APPENDIX B – INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Project: *Leading amid persecution: The Meserete Kristos Church from 1974 to 1991*
Researcher: Brent Kipfer, Doctor of Ministry student, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Please consider this information carefully before deciding to take part in this study. Feel free to ask questions about this research, your role and rights as a volunteer, risks and benefits to participating, and anything else that is not clear to you.

Purpose of the research: To understand the experience of leaders in the Meserete Kristos Church (MKC) between 1974 and 1991. I hope to publish this research to give the global church insight into the dynamics of Christian leadership in contexts of persecution.

Your role: You are invited to participate in this study because you gave leadership in the MKC during the years of the Derg. If you choose to take part, you will be asked about your experience as a leader while the church was under persecution.

Recording: With your permission, I will tape record the interview so that I can refer to it later. If you change your mind and would like the recording to end or be erased, I will honour your wishes.

Time required: The interview will probably take about 1 ½ hours.

Risks: No risks are anticipated.

Benefits: This is an opportunity to share your experiences and insights as leader during a time of persecution. Christians in other settings – persecuted or not – may benefit from this.

Compensation: A small thank-you gift.

Your information: Information from interviews will form the basis for my written thesis in the Doctor of Ministry program at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. I also hope to share my research findings in other publications and presentations.

Confidentiality: I will keep your identity confidential in my records of this interview and in my reports of this study. I plan to store the recording of this interview securely in an electronic file which only I can access. I plan to transcribe the interview into writing. I will identify you with a code name in that document and in any report or publication based on this study. I plan to summarize the results of the study in a way that you cannot be identified. If you give permission, I may use a quotation from this interview, indicate if you are male or female and/or if you exercised leadership at the cell, congregation or denominational level – but only if it would not reveal your identity.

Voluntary participation: Taking part in this research study is voluntary. You may choose to not to take part at all. If you agree to participate in the interview, you are free to skip any question or end the interview at any time without penalty. If you ask that any information you provide be erased, it will be done.

Questions: If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact: Brent Kipfer at 48 Lawrence Street, Wellesley, Ontario, N0B 2T0, Canada; brentsarahkipfer@gmail.com; 519-656-2326. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the Co-Chair of the Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary Institutional Review Board, David Currie at: dcurrie@gordonconwell.edu; 978-646-4176.

Agreement: I understand the nature and purpose of this research. My questions have been answered and I agree to take part in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

I do ☐ I do not ☐ give permission for this interview to be recorded.

I give permission for the following information to be included in publications resulting from this study:

Yes ☐ No ☐ My gender

Yes ☐ No ☐ My role as leader at the cell, congregation or denominational level

Yes ☐ No ☐ Direct quotations from this interview

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Address (optional): _____

Researcher's Statement

I have discussed the above points with the participant. It is my opinion that that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

Signature of Interviewer: _____

Date: _____

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